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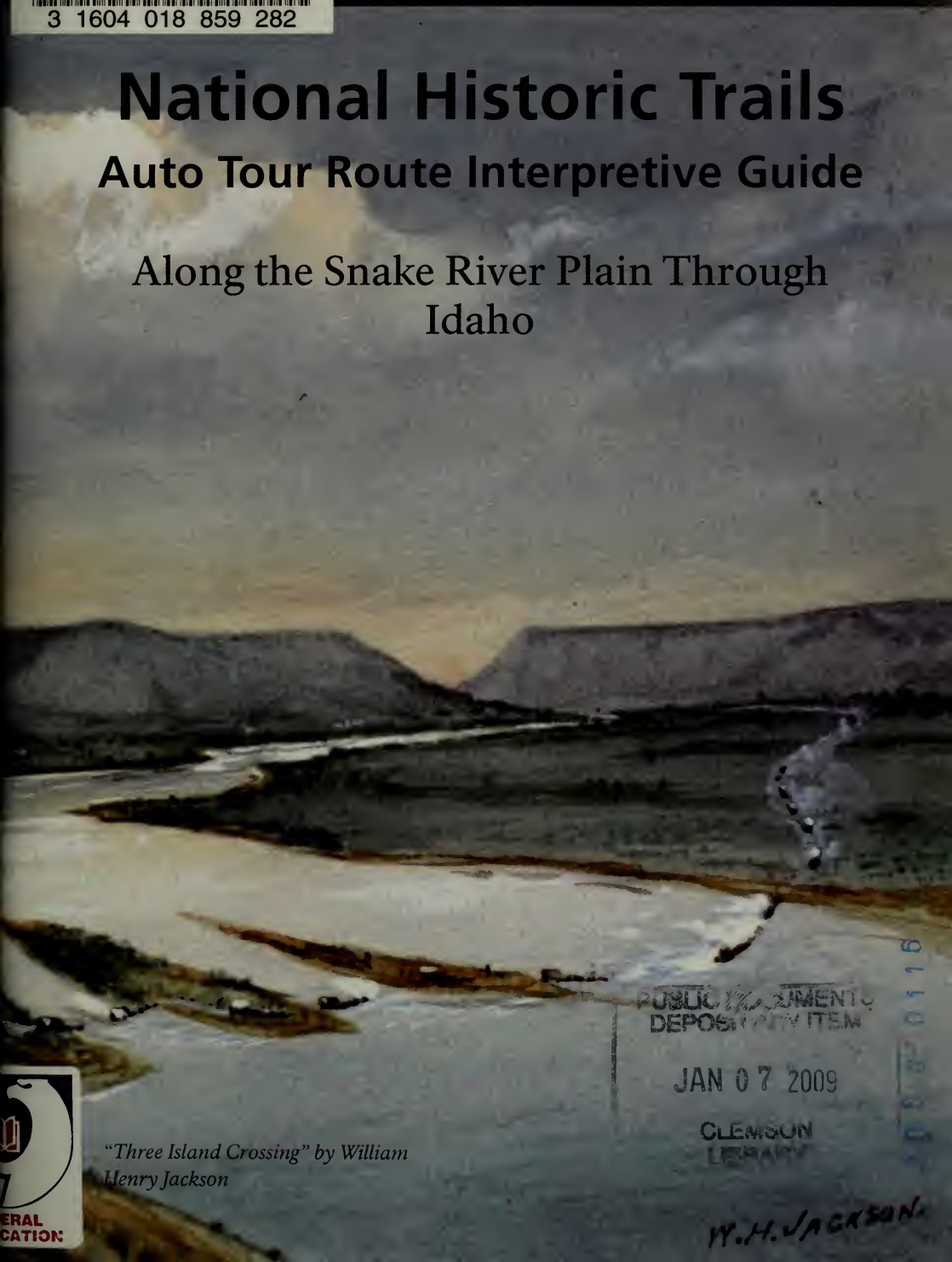
National Historic Trails

Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide

Along the Snake River Plain Through Idaho



"Three Island Crossing" by William Henry Jackson

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"Great Falls" on the Snake River. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS

AUTO TOUR ROUTE INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

The Tangle of Trails Through Idaho

Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

Many of the pioneer trails and other historic routes that are important in our nation's past have been designated by Congress as National Historic Trails. While most of the old roads and routes still in existance are not open to motorized traffic, people can drive along modern highways that closely parallel the original trails. Those modern roads are designated as **Auto Tour Routes**, and they are marked with highway signs and trail logos to help today's travelers follow the trails used by the pioneers who helped to open the American West.

This interpretive publication guides visitors along the Auto Tour Routes for the Oregon and California National Historic Trails across Idaho. Site-by-site driving directions are included, and an overview map is located inside the back cover. To make the tour more meaningful, this guide also provides a historical overview of the two trails, shares the thoughts and experiences of emigrants who followed these routes, and discusses how the westward expansion impacted native peoples of Idaho.

Individual Auto Tour Route interpretive guides such as this one are in preparation for each state through which the trails pass. In addition, individual National Park Service brochures for the Oregon and California National Historic Trails are available at many trail-related venues, and also can be requested from the National Trails System administrative office at 324 South State Street, Suite 200, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111. Each brochure includes a map of the entire trail and an overview of trail history. Additional information about each trail also can be found on individual trail web sites. Links are listed on the "For More Information" page of this guide.

THE DESERT WEST

As covered-wagon emigrants crossed today's Idaho, they found the romance of the road wearing as thin as the soles of their trail-torn shoes.

"Freighters Grub Pile," by William Henry Jackson. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

The pioneers' initial energy and excitement curdled into fatigue and crankiness after three or more months on the road. Nightly fireside dances got left behind back down the trail, next to Grandpa's clock, Mother's good china, and heaps of souring bacon. High-jinks and horse races grew rare, quarrels more frequent. Journal-keepers, when they mustered the energy to write at all, generally jotted terse complaints about fellow travelers, Indians, heat, exhaustion, dust, mosquitoes, aches and pains, and the "stink" of the never-ending sagebrush.

It seems the nearer we approach Oregon the worse roads we have, and a worse more rough looking country.
—Amelia Hadley, 1851 Oregon emigration

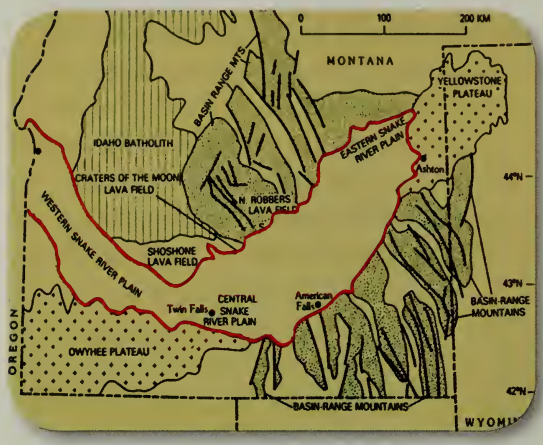
Felt today like giving up in despair, the intolerable heat and dust, together with fatigue makes me almost sick at heart.
—Esther Belle Hanna, 1852 California emigration

[Men] are by turns, or all together, cross, peevish, sullen, boisterous, giddy, profane, dirty, vulgar, ragged, mustachioed, bewhiskered, idle, petulant, quarrelsome, unfaithful, disobedient, refractory, careless, contrary, stubborn, hungry and without the fear of God and hardly of man before their eyes.
—Israel Shipman Pelton Lord, 1849 California gold rush

Most emigrants reached this part of the overland trail in late July or August, when the heat of the day presses down like a heavy quilt, burdening the body and muddying the mind. Some of the strongest oxen, too, were weakening and failing, having faithfully pulled heavy wagons nearly 1,300 miles over mountains and plains. But even as energy and enthusiasm ebbed, travelers knew that they were beginning the most difficult part of their overland journey. They were entering the heart of the Desert West: a land of volcanic barrens, sagebrush steppe, salt-crisped deserts, and mountain ranges like rows of teeth. Idaho's part of the Desert West is known as the Snake Country.

Southern Route of the Oregon Trail near Murphy, Idaho.

THE SNAKE COUNTRY



The Snake River Plain (outlined in red) provided a relatively flat surface for wagon travel. Base map is courtesy of Idaho State University Department of Geology.

The Oregon Trail, also used in part by travelers bound for California, follows the sweep of the Snake River Plain across Idaho. Much of this plain is irrigated farmland now, but it was no bountiful prairie in covered wagon days. Parts are basalt-encrusted barrens with sharp, broken rock that chewed up hooves and feet. Other parts are covered with volcanic ash or ancient lake sediments, easily kicked into the air by passing wheels and hooves. Instead of lush grass for hungry livestock, this land then bristled with gray-green sagebrush that snatched at wagon wheels and tore the legs of oxen. The plain is stingy with water, too. It thirstily sucks up runoff, pulls rivers underground into desert "sinks" (that's how Idaho's Big and Little Lost Rivers became lost), and then spits the water directly into the Snake River, miles away.

And that unfriendly river has cut itself deeply into the plain, where it flows aloof and armored by high walls of black basalt. For miles along the Snake River, thirsty people and livestock could only look down from high on the rim rock to the taunting water hundreds of feet below. The Snake was no tame workhorse either, no docile carrier of people and freight. Today it has been gentled by irrigation and dams, but 150 years ago this was a wild bronco of a stream, with rapids, falls, and cascades that bucked off all manner of boats. Such was its violence that French-Canadian trappers called it *La maudite rivière enragée*—"the accursed mad river."

This is one of the most singular rivers in the world being for miles enclosed by a perpendicular ledge of rocks & the thirsty animals are obliged to toil for miles together in the heat & dust with the sound of water in their ears & neither man or beast able to get a drop.

—Polly Coon, 1852 Oregon emigration

The Snake River (which emigrants also knew as Lewis's Fork of the Columbia River) takes its modern name from the so-called Snake Indians who controlled that region. *Snake* was the common name given by nineteenth century white Americans to the various Shoshone groups, possibly because the sign language for *Shoshone* was a snake-like motion of the hand. Many Shoshone groups depended on Snake River salmon as a primary food source. (Buffalo, once common on the Snake River Plain, were rare there by the 1840s.) Emigrants following the Oregon Trail sometimes encountered Shoshone Indians and their Paiute friends, the Bannocks, fishing along the river. Sick of a diet of bacon and beans, travelers were happy for a chance to trade for fresh salmon. These encounters typically were peaceful, with the emigrant "trade caravans" meeting up with the Indian "food bazaars" and everyone hoping to strike a good deal. But while emigrants grudgingly admired the native Plains horsemen they had met earlier along the trail, some scorned the Snake River people—especially poorer groups without horses—and tended to treat them harshly, sometimes brutally. For their own part, the Shoshones and Bannocks were skilled nighttime raiders who could make horses, mules, and oxen vanish from under the noses of wagon-camp guards. Sometimes after a quiet night, a guard would be discovered dead in the morning, his eyes open wide in surprise, his chest pierced by silent arrows. By the 1850s, many emigrants regarded

The Shoshone people viewed the emigrants as a threat to their survival. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

the Snake Country as the most dangerous part of the overland trails. The native people of the region viewed the emigrants as a threat to their very survival.

> *I can hardly lay down to sleep without It seems as though The Indians stood all around me ready to masacree me, shall be glad to go.*
>
> —Amelia Hadley, 1851 Oregon emigration

But Indians were the least of the worries faced by the first covered wagon pioneers who rolled into Idaho.

Towering basalt cliffs frequently kept thirsty emigrants and livestock from the life-saving waters of the Snake River.

FINDING THE WAY

The 69 men, women, and children who joined the first emigrant wagon train to set out across the Kansas prairie knew where they were going: to California, some 2,000 miles away. And they knew how they would get there: they would go west until they arrived. It was an elegant plan; but the devil, as they say, was in the details.

"Emigrant Party on the Road to California." Courtesy of Beniecke Rare Book & Manuscript Collection, Yale University.

In May 1841, no wagon roads to Oregon or California yet existed. There were only long-distance Indian footpaths worn deeper by fur trade traffic following the Platte River toward the Rocky Mountains. No member of the emigrant party knew the route, and no useful government map or published guidebook was available to advise tenderfoot travelers along the way. On top of all that, these American emigrants would be trespassers in much of the country to be crossed and illegal squatters on the land they planned to settle, for nothing west of the Continental Divide was American soil. Mexico claimed the Southwest, the U.S. and Great Britain disputed the Oregon Country, and American Indian peoples—nations, really, with distinctive languages and cultures—occupied and controlled the region. Yet the members of the "Western Emigration Society," as these pioneers called themselves, were determined to go overland to California and confident they would get there.

> *No one of the party knew anything about mountaineering and scarcely anyone had ever been into the Indian Territory, yet a large majority felt that we were fully competent to go anywhere no matter what the difficulties might be or how numerous and warlike the Indians.*
> —John Bidwell, 1841 California emigration

What these greenhorns lacked in good sense they made up in good fortune. Near the start of their trip, just a few days west of Independence, Missouri, they met up with Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick. The famed mountain man was guiding a company of missionaries bound for the Pacific Northwest, but he agreed to take the emigrants along through the Rocky Mountains. *"And it was well that [he] did,"* recalled pioneer John Bidwell years later, *"for otherwise probably not one of us would ever have reached California, because of our inexperience."*

Relatively flat land and adequate water made for a good wagon road in the Bear River valley.

Fitzpatrick led the combined company up Nebraska's Platte River, through the Rockies and across the Continental Divide at South Pass, Wyoming, and into today's Idaho southeast of present-day Montpelier. The party then followed the flow of the Bear River northwestward past Soda Springs to Sheep Rock, where the river curls around the north end of the Wasatch Mountains and turns back to the south. There, Fitzpatrick's party prepared to split up: the missionaries and their guide would continue to the Northwest by way of Fort Hall, a Hudson's Bay Company fur trade post, and the settlers would turn, pilotless, toward California.

"Westward America," by William Henry Jackson, near Split Rock, Wyoming.

. . .there was no road for us to follow, nothing was known of the country, and we had nothing to guide us, and so [Fitzpatrick] advised us to give up the California project. He thought it was doubtful if we ever got there; we might get caught in the snow of the mountains and perish there, and he considered it very hazardous to attempt it.

—Josiah Belden, 1841 California emigration

Fitzpatrick believed the inexperienced emigrants were foolish to blunder into the unmapped interior on their own. He persuaded about half of them to give up their California dreams and follow the Snake and Columbia Rivers to Oregon, instead. The other 34 determined emigrants (including a woman and infant) spurned the mountain man's sensible advice and turned their oxen south down the Bear River toward the Great Salt Lake. The Bidwell-Bartleson Party, as that group is now known, took the first wagons into northern Utah, but the trial-and-error trail they blazed down the Bear River, around the Great Salt Lake, and into Nevada was so difficult that few would attempt to follow in their track. Later California-bound travelers developed a network of better routes through southeastern Idaho.

We were now thrown entirely upon our own resources. All the country beyond was to us a veritable terra incognita, and we only knew that California lay to the west.

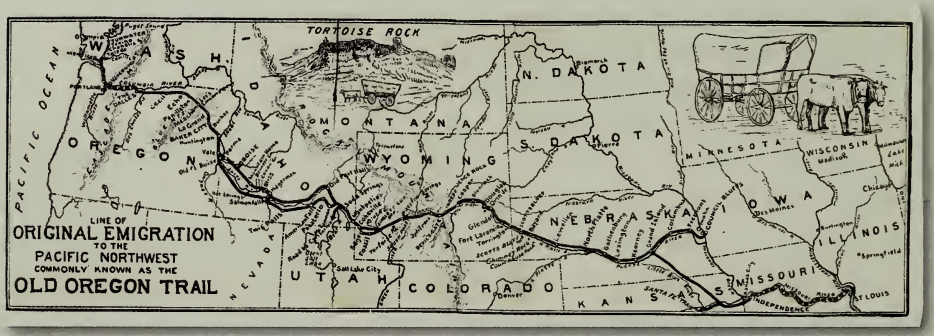
—John Bidwell, 1841 California emigration

But the other Western Emigration Society pioneers left their wagons at Fort Hall and continued with pack animals along the Snake River, as Fitzpatrick had advised. Their faint trace through the sagebrush would become the main emigrant route to Oregon, leading thousands of people west over the next 30 years.

As more wagons trickled and then flooded across the West, the track along the Snake River evolved into a wagon trail and finally a network of well-beaten roads that snaked around mountains and marshes, kept to high ground, and generally went wherever water and grass could be found. These roads were not rustic wagon-width versions of today's paved highways, direct and efficient, with two lanes for

traffic to follow in orderly single file. Rather, they were evolving, bustling, multi-lane, winding, spreading-out and drawing-in, free-for-all travel corridors with no rules of the road, constrained in their wanderings and widths only by geography and the locations of grass and water. They went wherever somebody thought he could drive a wagon, and they were developed by repeated use, rarely by engineers or work crews. Over the years, travelers developed a tangle of wagon trails through the basin and range country of southeastern Idaho and across the Snake River Plain as they sought out shorter, easier, or safer ways west.

The Snake River route formed the spine of the combined Oregon and California Trails. To reach the river, westbound wagons first had to thread through the mountains of southeastern Idaho.



The basic course of the road to Oregon followed the Platte River to the Sweetwater, to the Bear, to the Snake, and ultimately, to the Columbia.

WYOMING TO FORT HALL

The combined Oregon and California Trails enter eastern Idaho from Wyoming through the natural mountain-edged corridor of the Bear River Valley. That valley was glorious: nearly 80 miles of abundant water, cool air, spectacular scenery, and plentiful timber, grass, fish, and wildfowl. Its beauty and bounty, coming on the heels of a hard, dry haul across southwestern Wyoming, raised the emigrants' spirits and inspired some writers to poetry.

> *Love never dwelt in a much more charming valley. Here one might live secluded. From side to side his eyes might rest on mountain tops and no gate left open, except where the babbling waters play.*
>
> —John Edwin Banks, 1849 California gold rush

The main trail crosses the Thomas Fork, stays north of the Bear River, and climbs directly into the Sheep Creek Hills. That climb was hard but the descent was far worse, forcing emigrants to lock their wagon wheels for a long, frightening skid down Big Hill to the valley floor. Furrows scoured into the earth by unyielding iron-rimmed wheels are visible today from U.S. Highway 30. From there the main trail went along the north side of the Bear River Valley through today's Montpelier and on to Soda Springs, one of the natural wonders of the Oregon and California Trails. The Soda Springs are a complex of gaseous mud-pots, fountains, and naturally carbonated pools, which according to Shoshone tradition are healing waters.

The descent from Big Hill followed the wash just to the left of center in this image. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society.

My spirits were low till I heard, "There is the Soda Springs." This acted like electricity....They are wonderful and deserve a place in the wonders of the earth.

—John Edwin Banks, 1849 California gold rush

The whole valley. . .is the most interesting spot of earth that I ever beheld. Here is a grand field for the geologist, mineralogist, naturalist, & any other kind of 'ist' that you can conceive.

—Dr. Wakeman Bryarly, 1849 California gold rush

The most famous of these features was Steamboat Spring, which huffed and whistled like a steamboat as pressurized gas and water erupted from a low travertine cone. Sarah White Smith, traveling with a missionary company in 1838, watched a prankster try to stop Steamboat Spring from spouting by removing his trousers and sitting on the cone's six-inch opening.

"Steam Boat Springs" by artist James F. Wilkins, 1849, at Soda Springs, Idaho. Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

"He did not have to wait very long for the flow," she recounted. *"It came gradually at first, but increased in force every moment. Doyle soon began bobbing up and down at a fearful rate. At this stage of the fun several of the boys took hold of Doyle and tried to hold him on the crevice, but in this they failed, for the more weight they added to Doyle the more power the spring seemed to have, and Doyle kept bobbing up and down like a cork."* The man finally pleaded to be released, exclaiming, *"I am now pounded into a beefsteak!"*

Steamboat Spring is submerged by Alexander Reservoir now, but a churning on the lake surface reveals its location. Dozens of other springs have been altered or destroyed by years of development, which began in 1863 when a settlement and an army camp were

established in the area. A few, including Hooper Springs, are still local attractions. Emigrants loved to sample their water, using flavorings to create soda beverages, mixing it into bread dough for leavening, or just drinking it like beer and imagining themselves growing tipsy.

> *The Sody Spring is quite a curiosity thare is a great many of them Just boiling rite up out of the ground take alitle sugar and desolve it in alitle water and then dip up acup full and drink it before it looses it gass it is frustrate [first rate] I drank ahol of galon of it.*
> —William J. Scott, 1846 Oregon emigration

But in the Bear River Valley, emigrants began encountering another natural wonder that was not so much fun: crawling armies of large, leggy "crickets" that devoured anything in their path.

The "crickets" are really a type of katydid—not a true cricket, a locust, or a grasshopper—that feeds on sagebrush and other plants. Periodically their population booms and they swarm by the millions, as many as 100 per square yard, across the Desert West. They will gobble up gardens and field crops, munch on clothing, quilts, and linens, and even cannibalize their own kind. They earned their popular name, *Mormon cricket*, when they attacked settler's crops around Salt Lake City in 1848. Native peoples used the insects to make protein-rich soups and pemmican "bread," but most emigrants regarded Mormon crickets as unappetizing.

Mormon cricket. Courtesy of Idaho Photo

> *The ground, for a strip of about four miles, was covered with black crickets of a large size. I saw some that were about three inches in length.... Our teams made great havoc among them; so numerous were they that we crushed them at every step.*
> —Joel Palmer, 1846 Oregon emigration

Wingless, dumpy, black, swollen-headed, with bulging eyes in cases like goggles, mounted upon legs of steel wire and clock-spring, and with a general appearance that justified the Mormons in comparing him to a cross of the spider on the buffalo, the Deseret cricket comes down from the mountains at a certain season of the year, in voracious and desolating myriads.

—Thomas Leiper Kane, in "The Mormons, a discourse delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 26, 1850"

Sheep Rock, called Soda Point today, is the northern end of the Wasatch Mountains. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

A few miles west of Soda Springs, the Bear River hairpins around Sheep Rock and flows lazily south toward the Great Salt Lake. Sheep Rock, named for the bighorn sheep that passing emigrants sometimes saw there, is where the 1841 Western Emigration Society split up, with Fitzpatrick's company going on to Fort Hall and the Bidwell-Bartleson Party continuing down the river toward Utah. In 1849 a third alternate, the Hudspeth Cutoff, was blazed as a shortcut to California. It angled directly southwest away from the Bear River at Sheep Rock toward the northeast corner of present-day Nevada, and soon became the preferred route of the 1849 gold rushers and later emigrants to California. Some Oregon traffic, as well as California-bound travelers hoping to resupply, continued northwest along Fitzpatrick's route toward the Snake River and Fort Hall.

Good bye to Bear River. In one mile farther we reached the junction of the Ft. Hall and Headspeth's cut off roads, and after some debate and a vote it was decided to go by Ft. Hall, the minority grumbling greatly. The Mountaineers had invariably advised us to take this rout.

—Byron N. McKinstry, 1850 California emigration

As the trail crosses today's Fort Hall Indian Reservation and approaches the site of the old Fort Hall trading post, the Lander Cutoff merges from the east. This cutoff, developed in 1857-59 by government engineer Frederick Lander, was the only federally funded road ever constructed for the overland emigration. Lander's road went directly from the Ninth Crossing of the Sweetwater River, near South Pass, Wyoming, to Fort Hall, thus bypassing the original trail's long meander southwest through Fort Bridger. But Fort Hall never served the emigrants who arrived by the Lander Cutoff. By the time the new road opened to traffic, the old fur-trade depot was closed and abandoned.

Fort Hall, built in 1834 by New England businessman Nathaniel Wyeth, was the first permanent American post in the entire Oregon Country. Hardball business tactics by rival Hudson's Bay Company soon drove Wyeth into debt and forced him to sell his enterprise to the British-owned corporation. As the profitable beaver-pelt trade collapsed in the early 1840s, the Hudson's Bay Company might

"Old Fort Hall Trading Post on the Snake River," by William Henry Jackson

have closed Fort Hall for good—but former trappers like Thomas Fitzpatrick found work as trail guides and began bringing new customers to the post. The developing Oregon Trail helped keep Fort Hall in business for another 15 years.

Fort Hall was the last trading post for many miles, and as California-bound Margaret Frink wearily observed in 1850, from there *"the worst part of the road is yet to be passed over."* It was a place where emigrants could re-supply, repair wagons and equipment, exchange livestock, and steel themselves for the hardest leg of their journey. Even the exceptionally fierce clouds of mosquitoes that greeted arrivals to Fort Hall did not discourage business. Many emigrant parties stayed for several days, camping among the notoriously buggy, boggy river bottoms around the post.

> *We camped four miles from the fort [Hall] amonst a million of mosquitos they would not let you rest a moment and after swallowing a cup of tea and about fifty of them with it I bundled up head and ears and let them sing me to sleep.*
> —Joseph Hackney, 1849 California gold rush

> *Mosquitos were as thick as flakes in a snowstorm. The poor horses whinnied all night, from their bites, and in the morning blood was streaming down their sides.*
> —Margaret Frink, Fort Hall, 1850 California emigration

> *I have been much in musquitoe country, but confess I never before saw them in their glory. They were so thick you could reach out & get your handfull.*
> —Dr. Wakeman Bryarly, 1849 California gold rush

Ironically, the very success of the emigration helped put an end to the fort, for the swelling tide of wagon traffic through the Snake Country ignited Shoshone and Bannock resistance. Conflict in the region helped persuade the Hudson's Bay Company to close its Snake River posts in 1855-56. Floods gradually washed away the fort's adobe buildings, but emigrants continued using the site for camping and some independent traders operated there. Today, Shoshone and Bannock guides lead travelers to the site of the old post, where they

can enjoy an authentic trail experience: the mosquitoes there are as welcoming as ever!

Starting in 1852, travelers to Oregon could cross to the north side of the Snake River near Fort Hall and take Jeffrey's Cutoff, later called the Goodale Cutoff, along the upper edge of the Snake River Plain. This 230-mile alternate goes generally northwestward from the fort toward Big Southern Butte, a notable landmark on the plain. The Goodale Cutoff then turns west and crosses the north end of today's Craters of the Moon National Monument. Trail remnants all along this route are still visible. They rejoin the primary route of the Oregon Trail east of Boise. It is a sun-baked, boot-shredding, wagon-jolting route that alternately crosses rugged lava flows, dense stands of sagebrush, and sand barrens with no feed for the livestock. Despite its challenges, the Goodale Cutoff became a popular option for Oregon-bound emigrants in 1862 when fights between emigrants and Indians along the Snake River road were making national news.

> *The roadbed is only known by the rocks and lava being crushed by the many teams passing over it...all day long we slowly creep along lacerating our horses feet and threatening wheels, axles, or some portion of our outfit. All along were pieces of broken wagons which had met with such accidents.*
>
> —Harriet A. Loughary on Goodale's Cutoff, 1864 Oregon emigration

Most wagon trains departing Fort Hall, though, turned west to follow the combined Oregon/California Trail down the south rim of the Snake River, which lay snug in its deep bed of basalt. The main trail crawled southwestward over increasingly rough terrain and, in places, along dangerously narrow riverside bluffs. One or two days' travel—about 25 miles—over that road brought

Dams on the Snake River have reduced the roaring waterflow, revealing the deep basalt walls that determine its course. Courtesy of Idaho State University Department of Geology.

travelers to the American Falls, where the river dropped 50 feet in a series of roaring whitewater cascades. Emigrant journals often remarked on the spot's natural beauty and sometimes mentioned trading with Indians for fish at this location. The tranquility of the place belies the violence that occurred nearby one hot August evening in 1859.

The Miltimore Party, a wagon train of 19 men, women, and children on their way to California, had strung out along the trail as they approached their evening camp above American Falls. Several well-armed white men poorly disguised as Indians—having dark skin but light brown hair and beards and speaking standard English—suddenly approached on horseback and commandeered two lagging wagons at the rear of the train. At their signal, 15 to 20 more men jumped the rear wagons and began shooting, sparing no one. The forward wagons quickly were drawn into the attack, as well. Some emigrants escaped into thick willows along the river, where they listened, terrified, to the "whooping and hollering of the Indians" through the night.

An army expedition from Fort Walla Walla, encamped on the Raft River, came across 11 survivors afoot on the trail three days later. Soldiers looking for more survivors found a horrific scene of brutality at the attack site. They buried eight victims in a common grave that now rests beneath American Falls Reservoir. Indians, probably Shoshones and Bannocks, took part in the killings, but according to some of the survivors, white "land pirates" in search of plunder master-minded the ambush.

Volcanic basalt along the south side of the Snake River Canyon at Massacre Rocks provided hiding places where unsuspecting wagon trains could be attacked.

Three years later and about 10 miles west of the Miltimore killing grounds, in an area now called Massacre Rocks, about 150

fighters under the Northwestern Shoshone War Chief Pocatello engaged several more wagon companies in retaliation for earlier unprovoked attacks by emigrants on his own people. Again, some survivors reported white renegades among the attackers. Ten emigrants and eight Indian fighters died in those skirmishes of August 9-10, 1862. Pocatello's Shoshone and Bannock warriors launched several more strikes that season along the Oregon and California Trails in Idaho, hoping to halt emigrant trespass there. Within a year, his efforts would pull disaster down on his people.

"Pilgrims on the Plains," by Theo R. Davis. During the 1840s and 50s, tens of thousands of emigrants poured across Bannock and Shoshone homelands. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

THE RAFT RIVER PARTING OF THE WAYS

News and wild rumors of Indian attacks through the 1850s and early '60s flashed up and down the trail and appeared in newspapers throughout the country, fueling public demand for military protection. Meanwhile, many emigrants already on the road weighed the risks along the Oregon and California routes ahead. Some 15 miles west of Massacre Rocks, at the Raft River Parting of the Ways, travelers would get another chance to choose their destination.

Newpaper stories and rumors of frequent Indian attacks stirred fears among emigrants traveling along the Snake River. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

They anxiously collected accounts of sickness and other troubles on the various routes. They wondered if their draft animals could better stand up to the ox-killing desert crossing into California or the exhausting pull over the Blue Mountains toward Oregon City. They pondered whether they had enough food to get them directly to the California gold fields, or if they should take the northern route to Oregon in hopes of finding game or trade along the way. They fretted that splitting up their wagon train at the Parting of the Ways might make their smaller parties more vulnerable to attack, accident, or starvation. But some simply set worries aside, shrugged their shoulders, and let chance decide their fate.

We arose this morning with a full determination of going to Oregon, but when we reached the junction of the road, the team stopped. Part of us, after everything was taken into consideration, concluded to try our fortunes in California; the remainder gave in and we concluded to let the oxen decide our destiny. We started them and awaited the issue with great anxiety; they turned to the left, leaving the Oregon road to the right.

—Jacob S. Hayden, 1852 California emigration

And at last, for better or for worse, after crossing the narrow, gravel-bottomed Raft River they made their choice. The flow of traffic split, the left branch turning southwest to California and the right branch going west to Oregon, and the diverging wagon ruts they created still are plainly visible for several miles west of the river crossing. The primary route of the Oregon Trail continues down the south side of the Snake River past Rock Creek and the scenic Thousand Springs area to Three Island Crossing—another important point of decision.

ON TO OREGON

Three Island Crossing, now an Idaho state park west of Glenns Ferry, had many hazards a 19th-century overlander dreaded in a river ford: deep, fast water, an uneven bottom with treacherous holes, and a local Indian population who sometimes would help and other times harass emigrants.

The process of fording was tricky and dangerous under the best of conditions. If a wheel plunged into a hidden hole, the wagon might tip and roll, pulling the yoked oxen and any passengers underwater to drown. Possessions drifting downstream from the overturned wagon might be fished from the current, but food would be ruined and the loss of several oxen would be devastating. With no draft animals, emigrants were forced to abandon their wagon and most of their belongings and continue on foot, carrying what they could.

Crossing the swift currents of the Snake River at Three Island Crossing was tricky and dangerous.

> *The bottom is very uneven; there are holes found of six or eight feet in width, many of them swimming. Those crossing this stream can escape the deepest of these holes by having horsemen in the van and at each side; it is necessary that there be attached to each wagon four or six yoke of oxen, the current being swift; and in the passage of these holes. . .when one yoke is compelled to swim, the others may be in shallow water.*
>
> —Joel Palmer, 1845 Oregon emigration

From the north side of Three Island Crossing, the main route of the Oregon Trail leaves the Snake River and heads directly northwest into the foothills. In about six miles the trail reaches Alkali Creek, where Theodore Talbot, a young member of John C. Fremont's 1843 exploratory expedition, recorded a heartrending encounter with an impoverished but dignified Shoshone family.

The main route of the Oregon Trail continues northwest from Three Island Crossing.

The starving family of five approached the company's campfire and watched silently as the men sat at their evening meal. *"The little party watched the progress of our meal in eager expectation: all pinched alike by famine, their mouths watering as they gazed with riveted eyes on the food, which we thankless and ungrateful as we are, were ready but a few moments before to condemn and repine against,"* wrote Talbot. The men of the expedition, which included Bidwell's wagon guide, Thomas Fitzpatrick, graciously shared their food. Then:

> *"Old Fitzpatrick, like the rest of us, moved by their misery offered to adopt their little boy and thus rescue him from the sad fate which it seemed probably would await him,"* Talbot recounted. *"But his offers were useless. The mother lent a deaf ear to every argument that could be adduced, her only answer being 'Pale face I love my child'! and with tearful eyes she drew her son closer...."*

Such moments of shared humanity between white and Indian people along the trails must have happened often, especially during the early years of the emigration. Judging from emigrant reminiscences and journal accounts like Talbot's, people were deeply moved by these personal encounters and passed down the stories to their children. But because these accounts did not command public attention at the time, stories of conflict came to weigh much more heavily in the history of the trails.

About 11 miles beyond Alkali Creek, the Oregon Trail merges with the North Alternate trail, used by the few emigrants who had crossed the river at various points upstream. Near that junction, wagons rolled past a popular hot spring and a rock formation later called Teapot Dome, and soon were joined by more traffic entering from the east via the Goodale Cutoff. Continuing northwestward, travelers paused at Bonneville Point overlook to view the lovely Boise River Valley below. *Boise*, named by French-Canadian trappers, means *wooded*, and the trees along the river were the first the emigrants had seen in many miles. From Bonneville Point, it is about 40 miles to the modern border of Idaho and Oregon. Within that stretch of trail occurred one of the earliest, most brutal and highly publicized wagon train massacres along the entire Oregon Trail.

Ward Wagon Train Memorial marker near Caldwell, Idaho.

In August 1854, about 30 Shoshone fighters attacked the 20-member Ward Party following a dispute over a horse near present-day Caldwell. Several men from a train up ahead, searching for lost livestock, encountered the attack in progress and attempted rescue. They retreated under heavy fire after one of their number was mortally wounded. When the fight was finished, eighteen emigrant men, women, and children from the Ward train lay dead; only two boys, both wounded, survived, hidden in the brush. U.S. Army investigators arrested four Shoshone men for the killings the next year, and a tribunal of army officers tried and convicted them. Soldiers shot one of the prisoners as he tried to escape, and hanged the other three men on gallows erected over the emigrants' mass grave at Caldwell. Two more Shoshone men later were executed separately by the army for the Ward attack.

. . .It was found that the Indians had burned the wagons and had also burned up the children. . . . This is one of the most horrible, massacres of which I ever heard.

—Winfield Scott Ebey, 1854 Oregon emigration

The Oregon Trail continues west from that sad scene for 25 miles to the Fort Boise trading post, on the east bank of the Snake River near today's Parma. Fort Boise was established in 1834, with the backing of the Hudson's Bay Company, to compete with Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall. It originally stood on the bank of the Boise River but was relocated about seven miles in 1838 to the confluence of the Boise and Snake Rivers. This Hudson's Bay Company operation was staffed in part by Hawaiian (Owyhee) employees and was a popular emigrant supply point for many years. The company abandoned the post in 1855 following the attack on the Ward Party. From Fort Boise, the primary route of the Oregon Trail crosses the Snake River one last time and enters today's state of Oregon, where it strikes northwestward to the Columbia River.

View from site on the Snake River where the original Fort Boise Trading Post stood.

But only about half of Oregon-bound emigrants took the main northern route from the Snake River to Fort Boise. Back at Three Island Crossing, high water sometimes prevented emigrants from fording to the north side of the Snake River; and some travelers were simply too afraid of the swift, dark water to chance a crossing even under normal conditions. Happily, there was an option: wagons could continue down the south side of the Snake River and avoid the dangerous crossing here and again at Fort Boise. Unhappily, the route was rougher and notoriously dry and grassless.

This is, perhaps, the most rugged, desert and dreary country, between the Western borders of the United States and the shores of the Pacific. It is nothing else than a wild, rocky, barren wilderness, of wrecked and ruined nature, a vast field of volcanic desolation.

—William H. Winter, 1843 Oregon emigration

And it was as vulnerable to violence as the primary route north of the river. On September 9-10, 1860, Bannocks and Shoshones carried out a two-day siege of the 44-member Utter-Van Ornum wagon train west of today's town of Grand View, Idaho. This was one of the rare instances where emigrants circled their wagons for protection, as in popular Western movies of the 1950s. But that defensive action did not save them: 11 of the company, including two women and three small children, died in the initial attacks, and the others fled for their lives into the sagebrush. About 30 Shoshone and Bannock men died in the attack, as well.

Map showing the various locations where many in the Utter-Van Ornum train perished. Courtesy of the Idaho Chapter of OCTA.

Events during and after the fight are complicated and often sordid, involving heroism, loyalty, and self-sacrifice as well as cowardice, betrayal, cruelty, and self-serving lies that delayed and misdirected rescue efforts. Seventeen survivors of the initial attack soon regrouped in the sagebrush and moved on foot down the river into present-day Oregon, casually harried by Indians along the way. After struggling along on a starvation diet for nearly 70 miles, the weak and exhausted emigrants halted when they reached the Owyhee River. The ordeal they suffered during their march and in their desert death camp east of Owyhee, Oregon, in some ways surpasses that of the better-known Donner Party. As they lay miserably in camp praying for rescue, the starving survivors of the Utter Disaster traded

their few weapons and much of their clothing to local Shoshones in exchange for fish, but the Shoshones soon moved on and left them to their fate. Days passed under the hot sun; one by one the people were dying. In desperation, the Van Ornum family and three unrelated emigrants decided to walk out and find help. Those remaining in camp resorted to eating the dead in order to survive.

Meanwhile, several men who had broken away from the initial fight eventually reached safety and spread news of the attack. The first to report was a former soldier who had stolen a horse and deserted the emigrants during the fight. He claimed to be the only survivor of the wagon train massacre, and he told so many conflicting stories that authorities initially did not believe a word of it. Accurate accounts from a pair of brothers who stumbled into the Umatilla Indian Agency at the Columbia River finally spurred rescue efforts.

On October 19, thirty-nine days after the attack, a U.S. Army relief expedition searching for survivors along the Burnt River found and rescued two of the wagon party who had become separated from the main group. On October 25, forty-five days after the attack, the rescuers found the remaining 10 pitiable survivors awaiting death in their Owyhee River encampment. Near today's Huntington, Oregon, roughly 50 miles from the starvation camp, soldiers also discovered the mutilated and scattered remains of the Van Ornum group that had gone in search of help. Four children with that group were unaccounted for, evidently taken captive. In the end, only 16 of the Utter-Van Ornum Party—including one captive boy who was given up by the Northwestern Shoshones two years later—made it alive out of that *"most rugged, desert, and dreary country."*

An on site story board provides brief details of the Utter wagon train disaster story.

About ten o'clock in the morning we saw signal fires off a few miles from our camp and we knew that either they were coming to kill us or help was close at hand and strange as it may seem... my heart was so benumbed by my terrible sufferings that I hardly cared which it was.

—Emeline Trimble Fuller, of the Utter-Van Ornum Party, 1892 reminiscences

Young Reuben Van Ornum (front center) was recovered from a Northwestern Shoshone village through the efforts of his Uncle Zachias (left of Rueben) after two years of captivity. Courtesy of Utah State University Special Collections.

'O FOR MORE PATIENCE': A SNAKE RIVER SOJOURN

Few of the hundreds of thousands of emigrants to Oregon and California ever faced the kind of stark terror and prolonged suffering experienced by the Miltimore, Ward, Van Ornum, and Utter families during their ordeals on the overland trails. Overlanders through Idaho mostly confided to their journals a laundry list of more mundane miseries:

It is dust from morning till night, with now and then a sprinkling of gnats and mosquitoes, and as far as the eye can reach it is nothing but a sandy desert, covered with wild sage brush, dried up with heat; however it makes good firewood.

—Amelia Knight Stewart, 1853 Oregon emigration

You in the states know nothing about dust it will fly so that you can hardly see the horns of your tonge [tongue] yoke it often seems that the cattle must die for the want of breath and then in our wagons such a speciacle [spectacle] beds clothes vituals and children all completely covered.

—Elizabeth Dixon, 1847 Oregon emigration

Killed several large rattle snakes in camp. There is some of the largest rattle snakes in this region I ever saw, being from 8 to 12 ft long, and about as large as a man's leg about the knee. This is no fiction at all.

—Amelia Hadley, 1851 Oregon emigration

Travelled 15 miles today over the most tortous road I ever could have imagined, nothing but rock after rock. The country all along presents the most barren appearance nothing but sage. Hundreds and thousands of acres with no vestage of anything but this hateful weed. . . .The sun has been oppressively hot all day and I am wearied & suffering from jolting over rocks which has given me a severe headache.

—Esther Belle Hanna, 1852 Oregon emigration

The road was most unaccountably bad, with chucks just large enough for the wheels to fit tight in & the dust raising & hanging over in a cloud, with not a breath of air stirring to drive it off.
—Dr. Wakeman Bryarly, 1849 California gold rush

dry traveling to day, no grass, water very scarce, stopt at noon to water at a very bad place on Snake river, 1½ mile or more a steep bank or precipice the cattle looked like little dogs down there, and after all the trouble of getting the poor things down there, they were so tired they could not drink and was obliged to travel back, and take the dusty road again, we are still traveling on in search of water, water
—Amelia Knight Stewart, 1853 Oregon emigration

We packed water up the bluff to our camp. The bluffs at this place exceed one thousand feet in height; they are of basalt.
—Joel Palmer, 1845 Oregon emigration

I do not think I ever shall forget the sight of so many dead animals seen along the trail. It is like something out of Dante's Inferno, — this barren waste of lava peopled with the skeletons of animals.
—Esther Belle Hanna, 1852 Oregon emigration

As soon as an ox dies, he bloats as full as the skin will hold (and sometimes bursts), and his legs stick straight out and soon smells horribly. . . .Thus they lie strewed on every hill and in every valley, thus poisoning the otherwise pure air. The most die after getting over some hard place, or long stretch.
—Byron McKinstry, 1850 California emigration

We are near being eaten alive by the mosquitoes, there are thousands of them buzzing a bout our ears which makes one almost frantic. . . .
—Esther Belle Hanna, 1852 Oregon emigration

Lost two more oxen today out of our train, one drowned in the river, another died from fatigue. A camp near us at noon had 12 sick in it, all the same disease, some of them very low.
—Esther Belle Hanna, 1852 Oregon emigration

This day is excessively hot, almost melting, & dust blinding. O for more patience to endure it all.
—Esther Belle Hanna, 1852 Oregon emigration

Women, in particular, poured their unhappiness into their journals. Their camp chores— packing, unpacking, fuel-collecting, fire-making, cooking, dishwashing, laundry, mending, child care, *childbirth*—were exhausting and constant. In many cases, wives had had no voice in the decision to leave their comfortable homes and move their families thousands of miles in a covered wagon. Their husbands one day had announced they were going. They cried, but they went. It was what a good wife did.

Noontime and evening camp along the trail meant a time to rest for some and a time of exhausting chores for others. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

'DEATH OR THE DIGGINS'

...The [California] road bids farewell to the Snake River and strikes off to the left. Here also 'The Oregon Trail' strikes off to the right & leaves us alone in our glory, with no other goal before us but Death or the Diggins.
—Dr. Wakeman Bryarly, 1849 California gold rush

Back at the Raft River Parting of the Ways, those who favored California turned southwest up the broad Raft River Valley. The trail soon swings west at Cassia Creek and begins climbing toward a pass between two mountain ranges. On the Cassia Creek bottoms, about 30 miles from the Parting of the Ways, the Hudspeth Cutoff from Sheep Rock rejoins the California road.

The Hudspeth Cutoff is a difficult, 110-mile alternate opened by Forty-niners in a hurry to reach the California gold fields but in the end it snips fewer than 25 miles from the primary route through Fort Hall. The route saved miles, but not time. Trains that split at the Hudspeth junction, with one group taking the cutoff and the other following the Raft River, typically rolled into the City of Rocks at the same time. Still, many travelers thought the more direct route was worth the demand on their oxen, and so the Hudspeth Cutoff captured much of the California traffic through the coming years. As emigrant traffic and Indian troubles in the area grew, though, the cutoff proved no safer and no faster than the old Fort Hall route. In July 1859, a month before the Miltimore killings at American Falls, attackers ambushed two small wagon trains on the Hudspeth Cutoff. They killed six emigrants and wounded seven others. As in the later attacks, survivors reported that "white Indians" as well as Bannocks and Shoshones were involved.

Map of Oregon Trail variants through Idaho. Courtesy Idaho State Parks.

The merged California traffic snaked up Cassia Creek and turned south toward the magnificent City of Rocks, a well-watered, sage-scented valley trimmed with wondrous rock formations that thrilled the emigrants and lit their imaginations. Many likened the place to a "silent city" of pyramids, cathedrals, and castles.

> *Here all the language that I Command. will not describe the Scenery around our encampment it is rich beyond anything I have [ever] beheld. . . .If a mountain distroying Angel had been dispatched here with power to distoy and Scater the elements of the Mountains. He could not hae done more than has been done here*
>
> —Richard M. May, 1848 California emigration

> *We were so spellbound with the beauty and strangeness of it all that no thought of Indians entered our heads.*
>
> —Helen Carpenter, 1857 California emigration

Pyramid Circle, Twin Sisters, Napoleon's Castle, City Hotel—these were among the granite monoliths that emigrants merrily explored and named as they continued down the California Road through the City of Rocks. Today the valley is still a popular attraction, City of Rocks National Reserve, where visitors can explore the countryside, retrace wagon ruts through the sagebrush, and photograph emigrant names painted with axle grease onto rock "registers."

But the Northern Shoshones, too, have always valued the area. Here is the northernmost occurrence of the pinyon pine, which yields the nutritious pine nuts that were a staple of their diet. Here they hunted game, harvested wild plant foods, and grazed their horse herds. Most importantly, here was their home, and in this country of scarce resources, intruders were not welcome.

Wise travelers did not linger at the City of Rocks, but continued steadily southwest toward Pinnacle Pass. There the road threads a narrow, wagon-wide gap between two granite pinnacles, forcing traffic to roll through in single file. Just ahead, another trail alternate brought more merging wagons from the southeast. That road, Hensley's Salt Lake Cutoff, was used by travelers who had split off

the main trail back at Fort Bridger, Wyoming, to re-supply or lay over at the Mormon capital of Salt Lake City. Now traffic from the Raft River Road of the California Trail, the Hudspeth Cutoff, and the Salt Lake Cutoff all merged into a river of wagons and pack trains through Shoshone country to Granite Pass. From there they would nick the northwestern corner of today's Utah, skid down to Goose Creek in present-day Nevada, and begin the greatest ordeal of their overland journey.

For them, the worst was truly yet to come.

Twin Sisters, a popular feature photographed by modern-day travelers as they follow the California National Historic Trail through City of Rocks.

'OUTRAGES HAVE BEEN COMMITTED'

"Native Americans Planning a Raid." Courtesy of Library of Congress.

Hostilities between Indians and emigrants on the Great Plains have been the focus of many books and movies, but historians figure that 90 percent of all armed conflict on the overland trails actually occurred west of the Continental Divide. The root causes of these troubles were the same in the far West as they were on the Plains: severe impacts of emigration and settlement on native peoples' resources, and cultural misunderstandings, mutual suspicion, and isolated incidents that caught up innocent people into crushing cycles of revenge. Faced with these problems, some Shoshone and Bannock warriors tried to shut down the wagon roads and drive out settlers.

The extended Shoshone nation during the trails era consisted of seven culturally diverse groups spread out between South Pass, Wyoming, and Winnemucca, Nevada. They spoke several dialects of the Shoshone language and pursued different ways of life depending on the resources available in their territories. Some were mounted buffalo-hunters, like the Plains tribes to the east. Others were "foot Shoshones" who lived along the lower Snake River and depended mainly on salmon, like the Columbia Plateau tribes to the west. Some hunted big game and fished in the mountains and high valleys of Utah and Idaho. Still other Shoshones were Great Basin peoples, with little or no access to salmon or bison, who ranged long distances on foot to harvest

"Shoshone Camp," by William Henry Jackson. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

plants and conduct communal drives of small game. The Bannock Indians were Northern Paiutes who lived among the Shoshones in the Fort Hall area. The Bannocks and some Shoshones were wide-ranging buffalo-hunters, but they also fished salmon below Shoshone Falls.

> *Saw an Indian encampment of the Snake Nation. Some of the men are fine looking. One was a complete coxcomb; tall, and handsome, his face shining with vermilion, his long hair beautifully combed...*
>
> —John Edwin Banks, 1849 California gold rush

Shoshone and Bannock interactions with emigrants typically were peaceful, if sometimes tense. Native people gave directions and advice, pointed travelers to water, traded food for goods, and aided emigrants at river crossings in return for payment. Even the Indians' horse thievery was mostly for sport, meant to show off their skill and daring. Emigrants, in turn, fed Indian visitors at their evening campfires, joked and traded with them, and gave them small gifts. But as the emigration surged in the late 1840s and early '50s, the impacts of thousands of travelers on the region's natural resources grew severe. In 1852, a peak year in the overland emigration, some 60,000 people and 1.5 million head of livestock crossed the West on the Oregon and California Trails. Emigrant herds stripped the trail corridor of grass, seed plants, and root vegetables that fed Indian people and their horse herds. Emigrants hunted the game, fished the rivers, collected the firewood, and claimed springs and river accesses as their own campgrounds. Few were willing to pay for what they used. Shoshones and Bannocks began collecting

"Pilgrims Crossing the Plains." Courtesy of Library of Congress.

their own payments, usually by raiding horses and cattle from the emigrant herds.

> *The white people have ruined the country of the Snake Indians and should therefore treat them well.*
>
> —Charles Pruess, cartographer for Fremont's Second Expedition, 1843

Also in the late 1840s and early '50s, Mormon farms began encroaching on Shoshone lands in northern Utah and southern Idaho. These settlers converted Shoshone horse pastures and winter campsites into plowed fields and cattle range, and diverted streams for irrigation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints required its members to help feed displaced native people, but this effort did not make up for what had been lost. Conflicts erupted as Shoshones grew increasingly hungry and upset, demanded food, tried to harvest or destroy farmers' crops, and helped themselves to settlers' herds.

Mormon people also gave Indians they met along the road gifts of tobacco and food, which led Shoshones to expect the same of emigrants on the Oregon and California Trails. Instead, emigrants often met approaching Indians with suspicion and hostility, fearing an attack, petty thefts from the wagons, or a raid on their herds. Such fears were not always unjustified.

> *Another of the Shoshones came to our tent. They spring up, as if by magic, from behind some sage-brush; startling one by their sudden appearance.*
>
> —Nellie Phelps, 1859 California emigration

Bannock camp. Courtesy of John Eldredge (OCTA) Collection.

On the other hand, emigrant aggression could cause Shoshones and Bannocks to take revenge on the

guilty and innocent alike. In once instance, a wagon company ran off Shoshones who were using a preferred campground at Rock Creek in order to claim it for themselves. The offended Shoshones attacked the wagon train the next day and harassed other emigrant parties that season. Other hostilities arose when a white traveler shot an Indian man's dog and when an emigrant purposely tossed a shovelful of embers onto the bare feet of a Shoshone visitor. Some emigrants, too, took the lives of innocent Indians to avenge livestock thefts and other injuries. Chief Pocatello told Frederick Lander in 1860 that emigrants recently had killed the family of one of his principal men and that *"the hearts of his people were very bad against the whites."* Many of the attacks—and some hoax attacks that never happened—along the trail are attributed to Pocatello and the warlike Bannocks. Other bands of Northwestern Shoshones led by chiefs Bear Hunter, Sampitch, and Sagwitch raided Mormon farms and attacked travelers on the roads to the Montana goldfields.

I was very much frightened while at this camp, and lie awake all night - I expected every minite we would all be killed, however we all found our scalps on in the morning.

—Amelia Knight Stewart at Rock Creek, 1853 Oregon emigration

[The Indians] have been robd Murdered their women outraged &c &c and in fact outrages have been committed by White Men that the heart would Shudder to record.

—Major John Owen, letter to the Flathead Agency of Washington Territory, 1861

The white people have come into my country, and have not asked my consent. Why is this?

—Chief Taghee of the Bannock Tribe, 1867

The severity and rising number of attacks along the Oregon and California Trails in the Snake Country and on Mormon settlers in northern Utah brought the public clamor for military action to a head in 1862. On January 29, 1863, some 200 California Volunteers under Colonel Patrick Edward Connor attacked Bear Hunter's winter village of 450 Northwest Band Shoshones at the Bear River near today's Preston, Idaho. Following the fight, Connor reported 224 Shoshones killed. Others counted 200 to 300 Northwest Band women, children, and men slain, including Chief Bear Hunter—but not Pocatello, who had departed the village the previous day. Mormon settlers who examined the field afterward reported 400 to nearly 500 dead. Even the lowest numbers rank the Bear River fight among the worst mass killing of Indians in U.S. history.

Interpretive exhibits explain the story of the attack along the Bear River near Preston, Idaho.

Also slain were 14 soldiers from Camp Douglas, in Salt Lake City; nine more were mortally wounded. Although he failed to kill or capture Pocatello, Connor was hailed as a hero and promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

After Connor's punishing attack, the various Shoshone and Bannock groups one by one signed treaties over the next few years, and peace gradually settled over the Snake Country emigrant routes. Pocatello, once the most-feared man along the Oregon and California Trails, died of natural causes in the midst of his family around 1884. He rests

Colonel Patrick Connor. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

beneath the waters of the American Falls reservoir. His enemy of old, Patrick Connor, died seven years later and is buried at the Fort Douglas Cemetery in Salt Lake City, near the graves of his California Volunteers who were killed in the Bear River fight.

Stories of revenge and warfare do not accurately reflect overall relations between emigrants and Indians along the length of the Oregon and California Trails. Countless exchanges of kindness and hospitality are noted in emigrant journals, but these did not grab newspaper headlines, stoke public outrage, or color the lore of the West. Considering that nearly a half-million people took to the trails between 1840 and 1869, the deaths of some 400 emigrants at the hands of Indians over 30 years figure as rare events. (Historians believe more Indians died at the hands of emigrants.) But the violent encounters were shocking and widely known among both white and native societies. They shaped emigrant and Indian expectations of each other, fueled fears and suspicion, and triggered harsh political and military reactions among both groups. Although deadly violence between emigrants and Indians may have been statistically rare through the emigration era, its impact is significant in the history of the American West.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

May 10, 1869, Promotory Point north of the Great Salt Lake. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

The flow of covered wagons across Idaho slowed after 1869. The newly completed transcontinental railroad offered emigrants a faster, safer, and easier way to travel and allowed them to "jump off" onto the trail much farther west. Since then, the Indian trails, fur trade traces, and wagon tracks that once followed the *"accursed mad river"* across southern Idaho have been replaced by paved roads and interstate highways. Many of the place names on modern state highway maps are holdovers from the trails era: Fort Hall, Pocatello, American Falls, Owyhee, Boise...

But more than just names remain. Today's visitors can walk in wagon ruts at Three Island Crossing, Bonneville Point, Massacre Rocks, and many other places. They can taste the soda water at Hooper Springs, slap mosquitoes at old Fort Hall, and look off the rimrock to the basalt-edged Snake River below. They can bear the shoulder-sagging heat of midsummer at Craters of the Moon and breathe the fragrance of sagebrush after a thunderstorm over City of Rocks. Landscapes where emigrants, native people, and soldiers collided have changed little since the 19th-century. In Idaho, the past is still present.

SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

The Tangle of Trails Through Idaho...

Variants of the Oregon and California Trails enter Idaho in several places and additional alternate routes split off, cross, and merge across the state. **Auto Tour Route Segment A** follows the main route of the Oregon Trail and parts of the California Trail from Border Junction, Wyoming, to Parma, Idaho, east of the Oregon state line. **Auto Tour Route Segment B** follows the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail from Glenns Ferry to Parma. Optional side-trips along other variants of the Oregon and California Trails are noted.

However, numerous trail cutoffs also developed through the years, particularly in the basin and range country of southeastern Idaho. Some of these cutoffs are Congressionally designated as part of the National Trails System, but others are not. The two National Park Service fold-out brochures for the Oregon Trail and the California Trail show the routes that are part of the National Trails System. These brochures, like this guide, are available at many travel and visitor centers along the trail routes.

Variants of the Oregon National Historic Trail in Idaho that appear on the brochure map are:

> ***The Oregon Trail*** *(also called the main or primary route of the Oregon Trail).* The original Oregon Trail route enters Idaho east of Montpelier near the Thomas Fork of the Bear River and heads northwest to Fort Hall. At Fort Hall the trail turns west and continues down the south side of the Snake River to the wagon ford at Three Island Crossing, where it crosses to the north side. From there, the trail cuts northwest through the foothills to the Boise River and continues to Fort Boise, on the Snake River at today's Idaho/Oregon border. The eastern part of the Oregon Trail between Thomas Fork and the Raft River Parting of the Ways, west of American Falls, also was used by California-bound emigrants. This driving guide refers to that segment as the *combined Oregon/California Trail.*

The South Alternate of the Oregon Trail. When emigrants were unable to ford the Snake River at Three Island Crossing, they continued west along the south bank of the river. This alternate rejoins the Oregon Trail beyond Fort Boise.

Variants of the California National Historic Trail in Idaho that appear on the California brochure map are:

The California Trail. Many California-bound travelers followed the eastern portion of the Oregon Trail through Idaho before turning southwest toward Nevada. Before 1849, most took the trail from Thomas Fork to Fort Hall and down the south side of the Snake River. About 30 miles west of American Falls, the California Trail splits off at the Raft River Parting of the Ways and swings southwest through the City of Rocks and Granite Pass toward Nevada.

Lander Road. Workmen directed by Frederick Lander, a U.S. Government engineer, began constructing this federally funded emigrant road between greater South Pass, Wyoming, and Fort Hall, Idaho, in 1857. Emigrants bound for Oregon and California immediately began using it, although the road was not completed until 1859. The Lander Road enters Idaho west of Afton, Wyoming, and merges with the Oregon Trail east of Fort Hall.

The Hudspeth Cutoff. Blazed in 1849 by Benoni Hudspeth and John Myers, this cutoff splits from the Oregon Trail near Sheep Rock and goes west through four mountain ranges. It merges with the original California Trail west of today's town of Malta. This difficult but more direct alternate diverted most traffic from the older Fort Hall route.

The Salt Lake Cutoff. This alternate, opened in 1848, was a popular option for travelers who took the Hastings Cutoff from Fort Bridger, Wyoming, into Utah to resupply or lay over at Salt Lake City. From Salt Lake City, the route goes north along the east shore of the Great Salt Lake to Brigham City. There it jogs around the north end of the lake and crosses into Idaho about 17 miles

southeast of Almo. The cutoff merges with the California Trail just beyond the Twin Sisters and Pinnacle Pass at City of Rocks.

Some Oregon-bound emigrants used alternate routes on the north side of the Snake River between American Falls and Teapot Dome, east of present-day Mountain Home. These trails, called the North Alternate and the North Side Alternate, are not addressed in this Auto Tour Route guide. Another alternate, the Goodale Cutoff, splits off from the combined Oregon/California Trail near Fort Hall. This cutoff, which has several sub-variants of its own, goes north to the Big Lost River near today's Blackfoot, Idaho, swings west through Craters of the Moon National Monument, and rejoins the main Oregon Trail east of Boise. The Goodale Cutoff is included here as an "Also of Interest item."

The Idaho interpretive trail guide mostly follows paved interstate, federal, state, and local roads, but also offers opportunities to drive some unpaved roads suitable for two-wheel-drive vehicles.

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT A: WYOMING TO OREGON ON THE SNAKE RIVER ROUTE OF THE OREGON TRAIL (Oregon & California Trails)

To begin this tour on the combined Oregon/California Trail, start at U.S.-30 west of Border Junction, Wyoming, on the Wyoming/Idaho state line. This segment follows the combined routes of the Oregon and California Trails from tour stops A-1 through A-19. From there it follows the Snake River west on the Oregon Trail and concludes at the Oregon state line west of Parma, Idaho.
OR,
To begin this tour along the Lander Road route, take WY-89 north from Border Junction, Wyoming, and continue north on U.S.-89 toward Freedom, on the Idaho/Wyoming border. At Freedom, turn west on Highway 239/34 into Idaho and continue to Soda Springs. Join the main auto tour at stop A-5.

A-1. Thomas Fork Crossing (west of Border Junction, WY) was an emigrant ford, but later this and another crossing to the north were spanned by toll bridges. From here, wagons climbed the steep hills to the west. Many of the ruts they created still are visible on the hillsides. An alternate route crossed the Bear River about 6 miles southwest of here, keeping to the lower lands until the two routes merged again near the foot of Big Hill. A state historical sign at a roadside pullout tells the story. **Directions:** Follow U.S.-30 west from the state line for approximately 1.5 miles. The pullout is on the north side of the road near milepost 454.5. Look for traces of old wagon roads heading up the slopes to the west.

A-2. Big Hill (southeast of Montpelier, ID) was claimed to be the longest, steepest hill on the wagon trail between the Missouri River and Fort Hall. The climb up Big Hill (part of the Sheep Creek Hills, also called the Preuss Range) was difficult and the descent was steep and dangerous. Traces of the trail on the hillsides are visible from the

highway. The McAuley Road, a cutoff that avoided that climb, was blazed in 1852. It followed Sheep Creek south around the southern point of the Sheep Creek Hills.

Directions: Continue west on U.S.-30 from the Thomas Fork pullout for approximately 5 miles and stop at a small, unmarked shoulder pullout on the north side of the road. The scars of the wagon trail wind under the power lines and crest the hillside ahead. Continue another 8 miles to a pullout near milepost 441.7, where the state has placed historical signs for Big Hill and the McAuley Road. Faint traces of the old descent route dive off the point of the bluff and follow the ridgeline down to the floor of Bear River Valley. This land is privately owned. Please observe the trail from the public right-of-way.

A-3. Smith's Trading Post (southeast of Montpelier, ID), established by mountain man Thomas "Pegleg" Smith, served emigrants and gold-rushers in 1848-49. A state historical sign commemorates Smith's post, but no structural remains are visible and the precise site location is unknown.

Directions: Continue west from the Big Hill pullout for about 1.6 miles and watch for the pullout on the south side of U.S.-30 at milepost 440.1. Look back toward Big Hill for another view of the descent route.

A-4. The National Oregon/California Trail Center at Clover Creek (320 North 4th Street, Montpelier, ID) offers a one-hour simulated wagon train trip guided by a wagon master/tour guide. The "trip" includes a nighttime camp vignette where trail stories are told around a campfire. Forty-four detailed paintings of trail sites are exhibited there, as well. The center is located at Clover Creek,

an emigrant campground on the trail. Open in May, Mon.–Sat. 10 a.m.–2 p.m.; open Memorial Day–Labor Day, Sun.–Thur. 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and Fri.–Sat. 9 a.m.–6 p.m. Open by reservation only Oct. 1–April 30. Admission charged. For more information go to www.oregontrailcenter.org.

Directions: Continue west on U.S.-30 into Montpelier. The center is on the right at the U.S-30/U.S.-89 junction.

To detour to the Bear River Massacre National Historic Landmark, see the Also of Interest item below. Otherwise, continue west on U.S.-30, which follows the original alignment of the combined Oregon/California Trail. About 17 miles from the Montpelier trail center, watch for wagon swales and white trail markers first on the left and then on the right side of U.S.-30. An interpretive exhibit with a wheelchair-accessible walkway and exhibits is located on the south side of the road 22.9 miles from the trail center. From there, continue west on U.S.-30 to Soda Springs at tour stop A-5.

Also of Interest: **Bear River Massacre National Historic Landmark**. In January 1863, California volunteers led by Colonel Patrick Edward Connor destroyed a winter encampment of Shoshone people near today's town of Preston, Idaho. Connor attacked the Bear River village in retribution for Indian raids on trail traffic and area settlers. The site is a 1,200-acre National Historic Landmark, of which 39 acres are private property owned by the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. To the Shoshone people, this is a sacred site, a place of remembrance and prayer. Please observe the site from designated public areas.

Directions: This detour is a 100-mile loop. From Montpelier, follow U.S-89 west to Ovid. Continue west on ID-36 toward Preston for 34 miles. Turn south (left) onto ID-34/36 for about

5.5 miles. At the junction, turn right onto U.S.-91, heading west and then north away from Preston. A roadside pullout with a Daughters of Utah Pioneers monument and a state historical sign describing events from the victors' point of view is on the right about 4 miles from the junction, at U.S.-91 milepost 13. The Shoshone village was located in the fields on the opposite side of the road. Next, continue north up the hill on U.S.-91. Just past milepost 14, turn right into the Point of Interest that overlooks the Bear River Valley. This impressive, wheelchair-accessible interpretive site provides wayside exhibits that describe events from the Shoshone point of view. To rejoin the Auto Tour Route at Soda Springs, return to ID-34 (the Pioneer Historic Byway) and go north to U.S.-30. There, either turn east and work your way back to the many trail sites around Soda Springs (entry A-5 below) or turn west and skip to entry A-10.

A-5. The Soda Springs (Soda Springs, ID) were a favorite trailside attraction for road-weary emigrants, who marveled at the carbonated water and Steamboat Spring, a natural geyser now submerged in Alexander Reservoir. The Soda Springs Complex includes several trail sites and landmarks in and around Soda Springs:

Sulphur Springs (5 miles east of Soda Springs, ID) produce a rotten-egg odor that aroused the curiosity of emigrants passing through the area. At that site in wet years, modern visitors will find a shallow lake fed by warm springs; in dry years, only small puddles and bubbling "mudpots" are visible. Bubbles created by escaping gas cause the odor and make the water appear to simmer. Interpretive signs tell the geological story. Public visitation to this privately owned

site is allowed by the landowner. Please respect private property.

Directions: From the interpretive pullout 22.9 miles west of the Montpelier trail center, continue west on U.S.-30 for 2.2 miles. Turn northeast (right) onto Sulphur Canyon Road, a well-maintained gravel road, and drive 1.3 miles. There the road splits, with Sulphur Canyon Road turning due east and several rough two-tracks fanning out to the north. Visitors without high-clearance vehicles should park there and continue the remaining distance on foot. Leave Sulphur Canyon Road and follow the two-track that bears north-northeast—a small sign reading 126 indicates the correct route. The springs and interpretive exhibits are 50 to 75 yards ahead and on the right, in the wedge of land between Road 126 and Sulphur Canyon Road. Next, return to U.S.-30 and continue into Soda Springs.

Hooper Springs (1 mile north of Soda Springs), the most famous of the area's soda springs, was noted for its cold, naturally carbonated water. Emigrants added flavorings to the water to create natural soda-fountain drinks. Today the site is a city park where visitors can still sample the spring's sparkling water.

Directions: Enter Soda Springs on westbound U.S.-30. Turn north (right) on 3rd Street East and continue for 1.6 miles. On approaching a large potash processing plant, turn west (left) onto Hooper Road (not Hooper Avenue) and continue about 0.5 mile to the spring and pavilion on the south side of the road. After your visit, return to Soda Springs and turn west (right) onto U.S.-30/2nd Street.

Pyramid Spring (Geyser Park Street, Soda Springs) at Geyser Park includes a gray-orange mound—one of the original soda springs described by passing emigrants—and a captive geyser that erupts every hour on the hour. This "luke-cool" geyser was released when drillers seeking hot water for mineral baths unintentionally tapped into an artesian well. Now it is a developed

site with interpretive exhibits to tell the story. From here, visitors can walk a 1.7-mile route through town along a canal at the end of Main Street to Hooper Springs. It is a pleasant outdoor walk with a potential for viewing wildlife.

Directions: From westbound U.S.-30/2nd Street, turn north (right) onto Main Street. Turn left on Geyser Park Street, just past the drugstore. The park is just ahead.

The Wagonbox Grave (Fairview Cemetery, Center & 1st West Streets, Soda Springs) is the burial place of an emigrant family killed by Indians in 1861. An interpretive exhibit and a grave marker tell the story.

Directions: From the geyser parking lot, return to Main Street and turn south (right). Take the first right onto West Center Street. Take the next right into Fairview Cemetery and continue past the flagpole and veteran's memorial. About 100 feet ahead on the right is the grave marker, set between twin blue spruces. Return to U.S.-30/2nd Street and turn west.

The sites of Camp Connor, the original Soda Springs town site, the Shoshone-Bannock Peace Treaty negotiations, and a "Morrisite" settlement of dissident Latter-day Saints (South 3rd West Street, Soda Springs) are interpreted by four wayside exhibits at a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints parking lot. Camp Connor was located south of the parking lot; Morristown was west of the signs, and some of the original home sites are under the reservoir.

No ruins are visible. The combined Oregon/California Trail passed through the area below the signs.

Directions: From westbound U.S.-30 in Soda Springs, turn south (left) on 3rd West Street and continue about 0.1 mile. Enter church parking lot on the right to view the four exhibits at the northwest corner of the parking lot. Public access for this purpose is permitted by the church.

A-6. Camp Connor and the original Soda Springs town site (U.S.-30 west of Soda Springs) are described by state historical signs along the highway. The actual historic sites are about a mile east; see entry above.

Directions: From Soda Springs, continue west on U.S.-30. Watch for the pullout on the left at milepost 403.8.

A-7. Oregon Trail Park and Marina (U.S.-30 west of Soda Springs) includes a short segment of original wagon swale that crosses the entrance road. White posts mark the trail; interpretive exhibits that tell the story are awaiting installation.

Directions: From the Camp Connor pullout, continue west on U.S.-30 for about 1.4 miles, paralleling Alexander Reservoir. The park is on south side of road at about milepost 402.4.

West of Soda Springs, the emigrant trail splits three ways. One fork, blazed by John Bidwell's 1841 wagon train to California, turns south and follows the Bear River into Utah. This difficult route rarely was used by later emigrants and is not part of the National Trails System. A second fork, the route of the combined Oregon/California Trail, continues northwest to Fort Hall and then turns west to follow the Snake River. The auto tour temporarily leaves this main trail to

follow the third fork, the Hudspeth Cutoff, which angles southwest toward Nevada and California. The tour rejoins the combined Oregon/California Trail at Pocatello.

A-8. An Idaho interpretive site (U.S.-30 west of Soda Springs) has state historical signs and interpretive waysides addressing several trail topics, including the routes used by the first emigrant wagon train to cross the west. That wagon train split up near this location, with one group continuing to Oregon and the other turning south toward the Great Salt Lake and, eventually, California. Other topics include local geology, the Hudspeth Cutoff (an arduous shortcut to California), and Sheep Rock (later called Soda Point and Alexander Point), a local trail landmark at the west end of Alexander Reservoir.

Directions: From Oregon Trail Park and Marina, continue west on U.S.-30 for about 2.5 miles. Turn left into the Idaho Transportation Department parking lot and follow the green Historical Site signs to the interpretive area. Note: These exhibits are being relocated to a new kiosk on public lands 300 yards west of the transportation facility.

Return to U.S.-30 and continue west past Sheep Rock. From there, continue the auto tour west along the Hudspeth Cutoff (tour stop A-9) toward I-15, OR make a 35-mile detour north to historic Chesterfield on the combined Oregon/California Trail.

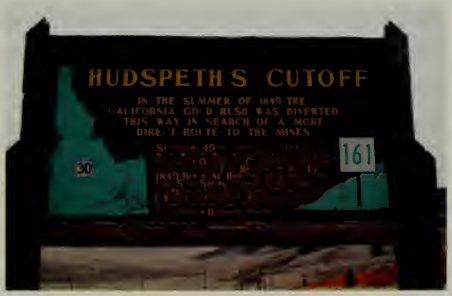
***Also of Interest:* Chesterfield Historic District.** Chesterfield once was a thriving Mormon community, established directly on the Oregon Trail in 1879—a decade after most emigrant wagon traffic had ended. Today the town is a historic district listed on the National Register of Historic

Places. The district includes a museum operated by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers (open Memorial Day–Labor Day, Mon.–Sat. 10 a.m.–6 p.m.) and 27 historic buildings in various stages of restoration. Guided tours of the town site are available in the summer; all buildings are closed in winter. Admission to Chesterfield is free, but donations are accepted.

Directions: To follow this 35-mile loop on maintained gravel roads, go west on U.S.-30 from stop A-8 for about 1.5 miles. Turn right onto Old Highway 30, which shortly turns to the northwest, and continue for 10 miles. After entering the town of Bancroft, turn right onto North Main Street, which becomes Main Avenue and then Chesterfield Road. Continue 10 miles into Chesterfield. Interpretive waysides are located behind the museum and just beyond the fence. Walk or drive up the access road to see them.

To resume the auto tour on the Hudspeth Cutoff, return to Bancroft. Cross the railroad tracks and turn east (left) at the post office onto South Main Street/Old Highway 30, then go 1 block and turn south (right) onto 1st Avenue. Continue through town; the street becomes Lund Road. Follow Lund south to U.S.-30 and turn west.

A-9. The Hudspeth Cutoff (U.S.-30), a difficult shortcut used by Forty-niners rushing to California, is interpreted by a state historical sign on U.S.-30. The cutoff, which crossed four difficult ridges and a 22-mile desert, was only about 25 miles shorter than the primary trail through Fort Hall. Few trail remnants are visible, as U.S.-30 was constructed over the wagon road.



Directions: Go west from Soda Springs on U.S.-30. About 0.5-mile west of the turnoff to Old Highway 30 (controlled by a blinking yellow light), look on both sides of the road for two low volcanic cones. These often were described in emigrant journals. For a closer look, turn into the dirt access road leading to the cinder cone on the south (left) side of the road; an interpretive exhibit there tells the story. Continue west on U.S.-30. A pullout

with information about the Hudspeth Cutoff is on the south side of the road at milepost 376.2, about 17 miles west of Soda Springs.

A-10. Lava Hot Springs (Town of Lava Hot Springs, ID) was a welcome rest stop for travelers along the Hudspeth Cutoff. Popularly known as Dempsey's Bathtub, the springs provided hot water for bathing and washing clothing. A state historical sign along the highway tells the story. The main hot springs area is now operated by the state of Idaho as a public facility; other springs are privately operated as a guest spa and resort.

Directions: Approaching town on U.S.-30, bear left onto Main Street, which parallels the highway. Continue 1 block; the publicly operated hot springs facility is on the right, before the river. Also, a historical overlook of the springs area is located on U.S.-30 at milepost 333 on the south side of the highway, about 100 yards beyond the turnoff into Lava Hot Springs.

Continue west on U.S.-30 to McCammon, then take I-15 north to Pocatello. Here the auto tour rejoins the combined Oregon/ California Trail along the Snake River.

A-11. Fort Hall Replica Museum (3002 Alvord Loop, Upper Level Ross Park, Pocatallo, ID) is a full-size replica of the original Fort Hall, established in 1834 as a fur trade post. The fort later served emigrants as a supply post on the long road to Oregon and California, and eventually fell to ruin. The replica was built off-site in the 1960s to commemorate the area's history. Structures and artifacts are on exhibit. The replica is open mid-April until Memorial Day weekend, Tues.–Sat. 10 a.m.–2 p.m.; Memorial Day–Labor Day, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. daily; and September, Tues.–Sat.10 a.m.–2 p.m. Closed winters. Admission charged.

Directions: From I-15 northbound, take Exit 67 (I-15 Business Loop) toward Pocatello. At the end of the exit, turn left onto the business loop and enter the left lane. Take the first left, about 0.7 mile from the exit, onto the Avenue of Chiefs and drive up the hill.

Signs to the museum, the Pocatello Zoo, the Ross Park Aquatic Complex, and the Bannock County Museum guide the way.

A-12. Bannock County Historical Museum (3000 Alvord Loop, Pocatello) exhibits Shoshone and Bannock Indian items. Open Memorial Day–Labor Day, daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; winters, Tues.–Sat. 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Modest admission charged.

Directions: Next door to Fort Hall Replica Museum.

From here, you have three options:

To continue west along the combined Oregon/California Trail, *return to northbound I-15 through Pocatello and turn west on I-86 toward American Falls. Skip to entry A-15 for further driving directions.*

To go to the town of Fort Hall and associated sites on Shoshone-Bannock lands, *about 25 miles north of the Fort Hall Replica Museum, take I-15 north and follow directions for entries A-13 and A-14 below. From Fort Hall, either return to Pocatello and continue west on I-86 to tour stop A-15, OR follow the Goodale Cutoff.*

To follow the Goodale Cutoff, *take I-15 north from Fort Hall and follow the driving directions in the Also of Interest item following entry A-14.*

A-13. Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum (Simplot Road, Fort Hall, ID) exhibits objects from the Shoshone and Bannock Indian Tribes and provides information about tribal history. Open June–Aug., daily, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sept –May, Mon.–Fri. 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. Modest admission charged.

Directions: Fort Hall is about halfway between Pocatello and Blackfoot, Idaho. From Pocatello, take I-15 north to Exit 80 at the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Turn west (left) at the end of the exit onto Ross Fork Road. The museum is on the south side of the Trading Post Complex, less than a mile from the freeway exit and about 2 miles east of the town of Fort Hall.

A-14. The Site of Old Fort Hall, the Ross Fork Trail Segment, and the Lander Road Ruts (Fort Hall, ID) are located within the boundaries of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Guided tours of trail sites on the reservation are available for a modest fee, and must be arranged directly with the Shoshone Bannock Tribes. To request a tour, call the Shoshone-Bannock Museum at (208) 237-9791. Do not explore reservation lands without permission.

From Fort Hall, return to Pocatello via I-15 south and take Exit 72 to I-86 west, toward American Falls; OR take I-15 north and follow the Goodale Cutoff (see Also of Interest item below).

Also of Interest: **The Goodale Cutoff and Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve.** The Goodale Cutoff splits from the combined Oregon/California Trail at Fort Hall, turns west at Big Lost River, passes through Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, and rejoins the Oregon Trail east of Boise. Interpretive exhibits are at various locations along U.S.-20. Exhibits at overlooks near the Craters of the Moon entrance and an exhibit in the park visitor center detail journal entries of emigrants who took this alternate route along the edge of the lava lands. White markers visible along the highway and a state historical marker show the approximate location of the trail. This 230-mile side-trip bypasses all Oregon/California Trail sites along the Snake River between Pocatello and Mountain Home. *Start this trip with a full tank of gas and a supply of food and water, as services may be scarce along the route. Also, some roads may be closed in winter due to snow.*

Directions: From Fort Hall, return to I-15 northbound to Blackfoot. There take Exit 93 to U.S.-26 west and Craters of the Moon National Monument. Ahead to the right, two volcanic domes rise above the Snake River plain. These "Twin Buttes" were landmarks for emigrants traveling along the cutoff. A third prominence in the distance, Big Southern Butte, was also a key landmark because a spring at its base was the first reliable water source on the route beyond the Snake River at Fort Hall. About 34 miles west of Blackfoot, turn left onto U.S.-26/20 and continue west through Arco. About 18 miles west of Arco is the entrance to Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, with lava fields and cinder cones that were observed by passing emigrants.

From there, continue west on U.S.-26/20 to Mountain Home. To resume the drive along Auto Tour Segment A from Mountain Home, go west on I-84 and skip to entry A-29; OR to join the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail route, go east on I-84 to Glenns Ferry and skip to Auto Tour Segment B on page 78.

A-15. American Falls (Falls Avenue, American Falls, ID) was a series of cataracts, often noted by passing emigrants, where the Snake River drops about 50 feet in elevation. A dam built at the site has submerged some of the cataracts, but the lowest ones still are visible. A 1937 monument commemorates the trail, which ran along the south bank of the river and now lies beneath the reservoir.

Directions: From I-86, take Exit 40 and turn right on the business loop into American Falls. Where the road splits, continue straight on Pocatello Avenue, which parallels the freeway. Cross Hillcrest Avenue and continue to the intersection with Bannock Avenue. Follow the curve of the main road northwest past a city park. Two blocks after the intersection, turn south (left) onto Fort Hall Avenue and continue 6 blocks. Just past the golf course, the road curves south and becomes Lincoln Street. Drive 2 more blocks to Falls Avenue, turn west (right), and continue 0.7 mile

to a viewpoint and monument above the falls. From the south side of the parking lot near the power complex, follow a path and stairs to some shady overlook and picnic areas; or to access the river and overlooks from below, drive back up Falls Avenue 1 block, turn right onto Valdez Street, and follow the "Sportsman's Access" signs to the Oregon Trail River Access. Camping (no hookups), toilet facilities, and a boat launch are available there, and the gravel path along the river offers opportunities to observe waterfowl.

Return to Falls Avenue, turn east (right), and continue 9 blocks to Lincoln Street/Business Loop I-86. Turn south (right) onto Lincoln to return to westbound I-86.

A-16. Snake River Overlook and Oregon Trail Interpretive Rest Stop (west of American Falls) offers a fine view of the river, a pleasant walking path with interpretive exhibits about this stretch of trail, and original wagon ruts (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) to explore. Indians, possibly in collaboration with white men, attacked two wagon trains in this area in August 1862.

Directions: The rest stop is located along westbound I-86 at milepost 31 about 5 miles southwest of American Falls. *This rest stop is not accessible from eastbound lanes, but the associated trail ruts also can be approached from Massacre Rocks State Park, a couple miles farther east (see entry A-17).* Enter the rest stop and drive south past the restrooms and down the loop drive to the kiosk with interpretive exhibits. Park there and walk down the paved trail about 0.5 mile to the Snake River overlook. Turn left and follow the trail under both lanes of the freeway. Follow the trail to the right and continue to a series of interpretive wayside exhibits on trail history. Deep wagon ruts lie beyond the exhibits. Continue along the footpaths to see more trail remnants.

A-17. Massacre Rocks State Park (west of American Falls) preserves some deep trail ruts that can be approached via a paved path at the end of Park Lane, northeast of the visitor center. The visitor center itself has trail exhibits and interpretive panels about the wagon trails and the emigrant-Indian skirmishes that occurred in this area. Wayside exhibits along various interpretive trails teach about the geology, plant life, and history of the area. The park also offers 7.5 miles of hiking trails, biking, wildlife viewing and bird-watching opportunities, river access for boating and fishing, and a 42-site campground with hookups. Park grounds are open year-round. The visitor center is open May 1–mid-October, daily, 8 a.m.–5.pm, and open irregular hours during other months, depending on staff availability. Admission to the park and Register Rock historic site (below) is $4/vehicle.

Directions: From I-86, take Exit 28 and turn right at the end of the ramp onto Register Road. Take the next right (heading east) onto Park Lane and continue into the park. To access the paved trail leading to the wagon ruts, continue northeast past the visitor center to the parking area at the end of Park Lane.

A-18. Register Rock State Historic Site (2 miles west of Massacre Rocks), part of Massacre Rocks State Park, was an emigrant campground where travelers inscribed their names on basalt boulders. The largest of these boulders is now sheltered by a pavilion, with other inscribed rocks nearby. The site, which is a National Register property, includes a picnic area and a nearby corral for visitors traveling with horses.

Directions: Return to Register Road, turn left, and cross over the freeway. Follow signs 2 miles to the park. Pay admission at Massacre Rocks State Park.

There are two ways to return to the freeway. The closest on-ramp is east of Register Rock, requiring some backtracking. To get to this ramp, exit the Register Rock Historic Site and turn right onto Register Road. The road crosses to the south side of the freeway and then leads back to the I-86 on-ramp. To avoid backtracking, turn left (west) onto Register Road, which curves south to cross beneath the freeway. Continue west for about 6 miles. Turn right at the stop sign and proceed to westbound I-86.

A-19. The Raft River Crossing and Parting of the Ways (west of American Falls) is where the combined Oregon/California Trail splits, with Oregon emigrants continuing west and California-bound travelers turning southwest toward Nevada. A roadside monument with an interpretive plaque tells the story. The Raft River is now an irrigation ditch and trail remnants are not visible or accessible from this monument site because of intervening private property. However, public lands to the west provide access to 7 miles of original wagon ruts and swales—see entry A-20.

Directions: From I-86, take Exit 15 (Raft River Exit), about 11.5 miles west of Register Rock. At the end of the exit, set your vehicle's trip odometer and turn south (left) onto Yale Road, following the "Raft River Area" directional sign. Cross under the freeway and continue south past the Raft River Sod Farm. Where the road curves to the east 1.7 miles from the freeway exit, look on the left for a white fence and stone monument located at the edge of a farm complex.

To skip this wayside and go directly to the associated trail rut, take Exit 15, turn south and go under the freeway, and then turn right (west) onto the frontage road along the south side of I-86. See entry A-20 for further directions.

A-20. Raft River Parting of the Ways Trail Segment (east of I-84 and I-86 junction). The Bureau of Land Management has kept this 7-mile segment of original wagon trail looking much as it did during the covered wagon days. Explore the ruts on foot or horseback; motorized vehicles are not permitted. The actual parting of the ways junction is on adjacent private property. Please do not trespass.

Directions: Reaching the public entrance to this trail segment requires driving nearly 10 miles on unsigned, maintained gravel roads. From the Parting of the Ways monument, go north back toward I-86 and turn west (left) onto the paved frontage road along the south side of the freeway. The road parallels the freeway for about a mile, then turns north and passes beneath I-86. Set your vehicle's trip odometer here. Continue west on the paved road for 4 miles, watching ahead to the left for livestock pens. Make a 90-degree left turn onto an unsigned, unpaved county road that heads due south, past the pens, toward the freeway. In about 2.5 miles, cross beneath I-86 again and continue south for another 2.9 miles. As the reflective roof of a large agricultural building comes into view on the right, look for a sign kiosk and trail posts on the left (east) side of the road. These mark the entrance to the trail segment.

Continue south on the gravel road toward the mountains for 2 miles to a T intersection. Turn west (right) onto 100 South/Yale Road and continue about 1.5 miles to I-84. Here you have some choices:

To go directly to Utah and follow the Pony Express Trail and the Hastings Cutoff (the Donner Party route) of the California National Historic Trail, *enter the eastbound lanes of I-84 toward Salt Lake City. Consult the Auto Tour Route Guide Across Utah for further driving directions.*

To return to I-86 and resume the trail tour across Idaho, *enter the westbound lanes of I-84. Merge onto westbound I-86/84 toward Declo. From Declo you can:*

continue west along the Oregon National Historic Trail. Leave I-84 at Exit 208, and turn left onto the business loop/ Overland Avenue south toward Burley. About 1.5 miles from the freeway exit, bear right on a long curve onto Bedke Boulevard, with a directional sign to U.S.-30 west. In another 1.5 miles, Bedke curves south and crosses a railroad track. At the next intersection, bear right onto U.S.-30 west. See entry A-21 for further directions.

OR,

leave I-84 at Exit 216 and take an 86-mile loop trip to visit California National Historic Trail sites at City of Rocks National Reserve. See the Also of Interest entry below.

Also of Interest: **City of Rocks National Reserve and Visitor Center.** *This is an 86-mile loop trip on paved and maintained gravel roads called the City of Rocks Back Country Byway.* City of Rocks is a scenic area of towering granite pinnacles, thought by some emigrants to resemble a "silent city." The reserve is designated as both a National Natural Landmark and a National Historic Landmark. Traffic on the Hudspeth Cutoff, travelers returning to the California Trail via the Salt Lake Cutoff, and wagons that took the California road at the Raft River Parting of the Ways all funneled through this area—which was a preferred hunting ground of the Shoshone and Bannock Indians. Several attacks on wagon trains occurred in this area, but the sites are not marked or interpreted. The reserve's visitor center in Almo offers an outdoor covered wagon exhibit, a bookstore, and travel brochures. The visitor center is open April 1–Oct. 31, daily, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; Nov. 1–March 31, Mon.–Fri. 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Closed winter holidays. The park offers hiking and camping opportunities. Trail resources there include

immigrant inscriptions and wagon ruts with interpretive waysides. Day-use is free; for camping fee information and reservations call 1-866-634-3246. The park is open to visitors all hours year-round, but roads may be impassable in the winter.

Directions: From I-84 Exit 216, go south on ID-77 through Declo and Albion to Connor Junction, where the highway makes a sharp turn to the east. Leave ID-77 at that point, and turn west (right) onto Elba-Almo Road. Continue 16 miles, staying on this road, to Almo. The visitor center is on the left side of the road on the south side of town. To continue to the reserve, go south to the next intersection beyond the visitor center. (Note the Trails West marker immediately on the south side of the intersection after making the turn.) Turn west (right) and follow signs to City of Rocks.

Watch for the following trail stops along the road through the reserve:

Camp Rock, a granite outcrop, served as a shelter and a "bulletin board" where emigrants recorded their names. Pullout is about 1.3 miles past the entrance, on the left side of the road. Walk through the pedestrian gate at the left side of the rock. Interpretive waysides and inscriptions are on the opposite side.

Treasure Rock, another emigrant stopping place with inscriptions. Pullout is 0.3 miles beyond Camp Rock and on the right side of the road. Interpretive waysides are located on the west side of the rock. A Trails West marker describes the trail on the east side of Treasure Rock near the road. Continue along the drive and turn south (left) at the intersection.

Register Rock, another inscription site, is 0.6 mile beyond Treasure Rock, on the left side of the road. No on-site interpretation.

At **Pinnacle Pass** the trail threaded a narrow gap between two rock outcrops. The pullout is 0.5 mile beyond Register Rock on the right side of the road. An interpretive wayside tells the story.

A Trails West marker shows where the wagon trail crosses the road. The marker is on the left, 0.1 mile beyond the Pinnacle Pass pullout.

The **Twin Sisters** are two distinctive geological formations often noted by passing emigrants. They are west of the road; stop at the campground and restrooms to view them from here. About 1.5 miles farther south is a pullout with wayside exhibits that interpret both the Twin Sisters and the Salt Lake Cutoff. The junction where the cutoff merged with the main trail is a short distance from this pullout, and the site of a stagecoach station is nearby. From here, watch for white posts that mark trail swale along the south side of the road.

Granite Pass, where the California Trail briefly enters Utah and then crosses into Nevada, lies to the southwest. The pullout is 1.3 miles beyond the Twin Sisters pullout, on the south side of the road. The pass itself is about 6 miles distant.

To return from City of Rocks to Segment A of the auto tour, continue west along the unpaved road. About 1.3 miles beyond the Granite Pass pullout, turn north (right) at the intersection and continue toward Oakley on Birch Creek Road. At Oakley, Birch Creek Road swings west and merges onto Main Street. Go west for 5 blocks on Main, then turn north (right) onto Center Street/ID-27. Watch for the City of Rocks state historical sign at 0.7 mile from the turn. Continue north 20 miles to Burley. At Burley, ID-27 becomes Overland Avenue. Turn west (left) on Main Street/U.S.-30, and proceed to site A-21 below. It is 5 miles from the turn onto U.S.-30 to the next turn onto 500 West.

A-21. The Milner Ruts (west of Burley, ID) lie within the Milner Historic Recreation Area, managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The site, used by emigrants as a campground, offers

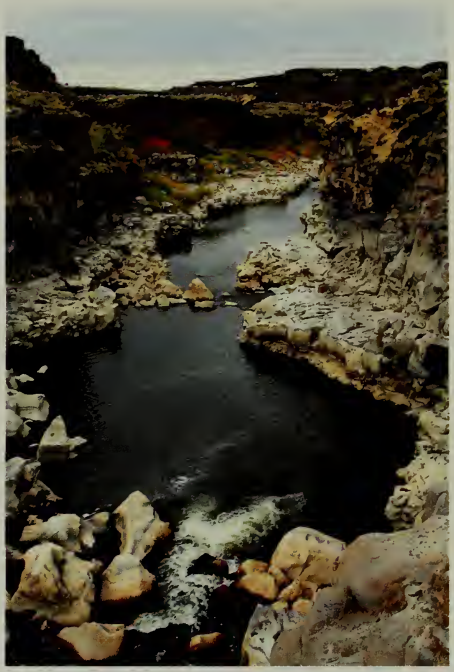
a segment of original wagon trail with interpretive exhibits, a pavilion with more exhibits, picnicking, a boat launch, wildlife viewing, and toilet facilities. Entrance $3/vehicle.

Directions: About 4 miles west of Burley, where U.S.-30 begins to swing to the left, look on the right for a Bureau of Land Management directional sign to the Milner Recreation Area. The turnoff is on the right (north) near the middle of the U.S.-30 curve. Turn north (right) there onto 500 West and, following a second directional sign, make an immediate left onto West Milner Road. About 2 miles farther, the road curves 90-degrees to the south and the pavement ends. In about 0.4 mile, the road splits; bear southwest (right), staying on Milner Road. A Bureau of Land Management sign for the historic recreation area marks the turn. About 2.7 miles beyond the split, Milner Road angles slightly northwest and begins to converge with the Eastern Idaho railroad track. Just before reaching the track, where the road bends slightly to the southwest, look on the right for another sign and the entrance to the historic recreation area. Turn right and cross the railroad tracks to enter the site.

From here, either go to Milner Dam and Cauldron Linn (see the Also of Interest item below) or return to westbound U.S.-30 and proceed to tour stop A-22.

Also of Interest: **Milner Dam and Caldron Linn**. These sites relate primarily to the fur trade of the early 19th century, but they shed some light on why the emigrants did not trade in their slow, cumbersome wagons for boats upon reaching the Snake River. On October 28, 1811, a party of westbound Astorians (fur traders employed by John Jacob Astor of the Pacific Fur Company) encountered a series of rapids while canoeing down the Snake River. About 1.5 miles below the present Milner Dam, one of the dugout canoes struck a rock and capsized, resulting in the loss of one man, the canoe, and a boatload of gear. (In 1939, a fisherman recovered from the river bottom several beaver traps, axes, muskets, and a rifle,

evidently the canoe's lost cargo. The artifacts are exhibited at the Idaho State Historical Museum in Boise.) Farther downstream, the Snake River drops into a "caldron" of whirling water that the Astorians dubbed Caldron Linn. There the group abandoned its remaining dugouts and split up, with one party continuing west on a route that would become the Oregon Trail. Some later emigrants on that trail stopped to visit the well-known site. Milner Dam has reduced the river's flow, but the caldron is still impressive. The dam is easily accessible; the road off the bluff down to the caldron, however, is rough and steep. Entry to both sites is free.



Directions: On exiting the Milner Historic Recreation Area, turn west (right) onto Milner Road, continue 1 mile west, and turn north (right) to cross the tracks. Take an immediate left on the paved road, 3610 North, then turn right and cross the canal. Upon leaving the bridge, make an immediate right and follow the road to the parking area and the monument and pavilion at Milner Dam.

After your visit, cross back over the bridge and make an immediate right onto the paved road. Follow the pavement around a 90-degree turn to the south and back across the tracks. Go straight (south) at the four-way stop and continue south to the next stop sign. Turn west (right) onto U.S.-30.

The unpaved approach to the Snake River overlook above Caldron Linn might be rough and could require a high clearance vehicle. The Bureau of Land Management recommends four-wheel drive for the final half-mile descent to the river. The road from the overlook to the river can be hiked, instead.

If not continuing to Caldron Linn, skip to site entry A-22. Otherwise, after about 5 miles on U.S.-30 from Milner Dam, cross a large canal and turn north (right) onto 4625 East. Continue across the railroad tracks about 0.7 mile ahead. Bear west (left) at the end of the road onto 3425 North and follow the road along the canyon rim to a Y intersection. The roads here are unsigned. Bear right, descend into the canyon, and set your vehicle's trip odometer at the bridge. Cross the Snake River and climb the switchbacks out of the canyon. About 1.2 miles beyond the bridge, turn east (right) onto 1500 South, a good unpaved road with a Bureau of Land Management sign at the turn. About a mile beyond that is a Bureau of Land Management sign to Caldron Linn. Turn south (right) there and continue to the canyon rim. The Bureau of Land Management recommends that only four-wheel-drive vehicles continue down to the river; otherwise, park at the overlook and hike down to the river. At the canyon floor, follow the main road around the hairpin turn to the left and enter the first parking area on the right. A network of footpaths spreads out in various directions; to find a path to the caldron, follow the roar of water. Children must be closely supervised here, as rough footpaths run along the unprotected rim of the river gorge. From here, return to U.S.-30 and continue west to Rock Creek.

A-22. Rock Creek (Stricker) Store and Stage Station (north of Rock Creek, ID) was a busy place on the Oregon Trail, with a farm, trading post, jail, stage station, saloon, cemetery, and a community of Chinese laborers adding to the bustle of trail traffic. The site also was a popular emigrant campground. Today the National Register property, also known as the Stricker Store and Homesite, is managed by the Idaho State Historical Society and the Friends of Stricker Ranch, Inc. The site is open daily for self-guided tours; the historic farmhouse is open April 1–Oct. 31, Sundays only, 1–5 p.m. Free.

Directions: South of Murtaugh, U.S.-30 begins a wide sweep to the northwest. Leave the highway there, continuing due west onto 3300 North. In about 2.5 miles, the road ends at an intersection.

Turn south (left) onto 4200 Road East and drive 1 mile, then turn west (right) onto 3200 North. Continue west approximately 5 miles to the Rock Creek/Stricker Site. The pullout, on the left, looks like a ranch entrance and the site sign is parallel to the road. Park at the entrance and continue on foot through the unlocked gate. To return to U.S.-30, turn east (right) onto 3200 Road, then turn north (left) onto Road G-3 at the next intersection. At Hansen, continue west on U.S.-30.

A-23. Shoshone Falls (east of Twin Falls, ID) was not directly on the Oregon Trail, but travelers could hear the water's roar in the distance and sometimes would hike out to the river to find the source of the noise. Today the "Niagara of the West" is the site of a city park and of one of Idaho Power's hydroelectric plants. Shoshone Falls is most impressive during high water in late spring and early summer, but is nearly dry the rest of the year. The falls can be viewed free from an overlook above the river; admission to the park below is $3/vehicle. Hiking trails, playgrounds, and picnicking, swimming, and boating facilities are available. The park is open year-round, daily, 7 a.m.–10 pm.

Directions: At Kimberly, U.S.-30 swings north and then jogs west again. At the second intersection past the jog, turn north (right) onto 3300 East, indicated by signs to Shoshone Falls. Continue north about 3 miles to the park entrance.

A-24. The Herrett Center for Arts & Sciences (315 Falls Avenue, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls) offers displays on the prehistoric lifeways of American Indians of south-central Idaho, including an exhibit about prehistoric Native American fishing techniques used on the Snake River. The museum is open Tues.–Fri. 9:30 a.m.–9 p.m., Wed.–Thur. 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., and Saturdays 1 p.m.–9 p.m. Closed Sundays, Mondays, and federal holidays. Free.

Directions: From Shoshone Falls, take U.S.-30 west into Twin Falls and follow Auto Tour Route signs to U.S.-93/Blue Lakes Boulevard. Turn north (right) and drive through town to North

College Road. Turn west (left) and drive 0.5 mile to the Herrett Center. Free parking is available in front of the center.

Also of Interest: **Buzz Langdon Visitor Information Center (Blue Lakes Boulevard North, Twin Falls),** Perrine Memorial Bridge, and Snake River Canyon Viewpoint. The center is a good place to pick up travel information and view the spectacular Snake River Canyon. This is where daredevil Evel Knievel tried to jump the canyon on a rocket-powered motorcycle in 1974. Today's visitors to this spot can sometimes watch BASE-jumpers leap from the Perrine Memorial Bridge and descend with parachutes nearly 500 feet to the river. The view from the canyon overlook makes clear the problems and frustrations faced by emigrants traveling along the Snake: plenty of water in sight, but often inaccessible.

Directions: From the Herrett Center, go east back to Blue Lakes Boulevard. Turn north (left) and continue through town. After crossing Pole Line Road at the north edge of Twin Falls, U.S.-93 curves broadly to the right. Near the center of that curve, turn left onto a side street that is also named Blue Lakes Boulevard and watch for signs to the visitor information center.

To continue west along the Oregon Trail, see entry A-25 below; OR to pick up the California Trail across Nevada, take U.S.-30 to Curry and turn south on U.S.-93. From Wells, Nevada, the California Trail auto tour follows I-80. Consult the Auto Tour Route interpretive guides for Nevada and California for more information.

A-25. Thousand Springs (west of Twin Falls) is an area where countless cataracts once burst from the rimrock and cascaded down to the Snake River. The water originates in mountains to the north and flows into the Big and Little Lost Rivers, which in turn disappear into desert "sinks." The flow continues underground and emerges at Thousand Springs. Despite modern diversions of the water, many of

these waterfalls still exist, visible from the highway as white streaks against dark vegetation. The area is now a state park, which can be approached from I-84 on the north side of the river.

Directions: From Twin Falls, continue west on Addison Avenue/U.S.-30. The road becomes 1000 Springs Scenic Byway. Continue west through Buhl. About 3 miles beyond Buhl the highway turns north and continues toward the Snake River. A pullout with state historical signs about Thousand Springs and Salmon Falls (where emigrants could trade for salmon with the Indians) is on the left at milepost 186.9. The springs, visible from U.S.-30, are along the north rim of the canyon.

A-26. Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument (west of Hagerman, ID) claims the highest concentration of Pliocene fossils in the world—as well as some Oregon Trail ruts. The monument is open daily, all hours. The visitor center at Hagerman, on the north side of the river, is open Memorial Day weekend–Aug. 25, daily, 9 a.m.–6 p.m.; otherwise open Thurs.–Mon. 9 a.m.–5 p.m. except for holidays. Free.

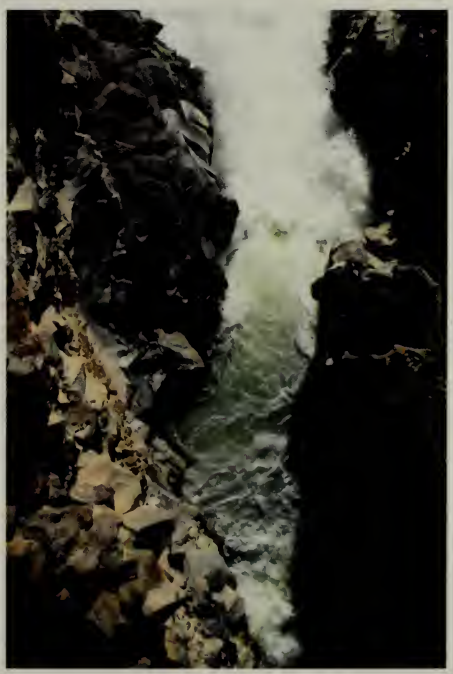
Directions: From the Thousand Springs pullout, continue north on U.S.-30 toward the Snake River. Immediately before U.S.-30 crosses the river, take the road to the left, Bell Rapids Road. Stay on this road as it continues west, paralleling the river. As it approaches the monument, the road splits: bear left and continue into the monument. Park at the Snake River Overlook on the right (about 4 miles from the Thousand Springs pullout) and cross the road to reach a gravel path and observation point with interpretive signs. The ruts are visible in the valley below. For a closer look and more information, continue along the path. Then return to your vehicle and continue up the hill, watching for trail ruts on

the left. Drive about 2.7 miles to the Oregon Trail Overlook (with restroom) on the left. Take the path out toward the point; the gully on the right is the Oregon Trail, now deeply eroded. After your visit, turn around and return to U.S-30. Turn left and cross the Snake River on the highway bridge. Continue into Hagerman. The visitor center is on the right at U.S.-30/North State and Reed Streets, near the center of town.

A-27. Hagerman Valley Historical Society Museum (100 South State Street, Hagerman), located in historic Hagerman Bank, exhibits fossils and trail-related artifacts. Donations accepted. Open year-round, Wed.–Sun., 1 p.m.– 4 p.m.

Directions: From the Hagerman Fossil Beds Visitor Center, go 1 block south on State Street. The museum on the southwest corner of State and Main Streets.

From the monument, the Oregon Trail continues northwest toward Glenns Ferry, cutting between bends in the river. Today that area is roadless. This auto tour follows modern highways along the north side of the Snake River to the old wagon ford at Three Island Crossing.



Also of Interest: **Malad Gorge State Park (1074 E. 2350 S., east of Hagerman)**. This park showcases a 140-foot wide, 250-foot deep river gorge, which can be viewed from rimrock trails. A slender pedestrian bridge provides an eagle's view of Devil's Washbowl falls. An alternate Oregon Trail route crossed Malad River about 0.5 mile upstream, above the deep canyon. Public campsites are available at the park, which is open year-round, 7 a.m.–10 p.m. Entrance $4/car; camping fees separate.

Directions: From Hagerman,

continue north on U.S.-30 past the junction with Pioneer Road on the left to the four-way intersection with 2525 South. Turn east (right) onto 2525 South. The road splits a short distance ahead; bear north (left) onto Justice Grade. The road makes a series of sharp turns and then continues east, becoming 2500 South. At the intersection with 1100 East, turn north (left) and follow the road to its end. Turn west (left) onto 2350 South and enter Malad Gorge State Park. Follow signs to Devil's Washbowl. This park is also easily accessible via I-84 Exit 147.

Continue through the park to its east entrance. Turn south (right) onto Ritchie Road and follow signs to westbound I-84.

The main route of the Oregon Trail intercepts the Snake River at Three Island Crossing, near the town of Glenns Ferry. This was another decision point for the emigrants. They could risk fording the swift, deep Snake River here (the ferry was not established until 1869) and continue west along the north side, where there was better grass and easier access to water. This decision, however, committed travelers to a second crossing of the Snake River at Fort Boise.

Alternatively, they could avoid both crossings by staying on the south side and using a variant known as the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail. This route was barren, dry, and difficult. Some well-publicized Indian attacks on emigrant wagon trains occurred on both routes in the 1850s and '60s.

A-28. Three Island Crossing State Park (Glenns Ferry, ID) has it all: an impressive historic river ford, a magnificent stretch of wagon ruts, a state-of-the-art history and education center, and public camping facilities. Look across the river to see trail ruts descending the bluff to the Snake River wagon ford at Three Island Crossing. Now re-enactors ford the river with covered wagons, horses, and oxen each year on the second Saturday in August; film footage of one of the events is shown in the

education center. The park is open year-round; entrance is $4/vehicle. The center is open mid-March through September, and its hours vary seasonally. Admission to the center is free with your paid camping fee or vehicle entrance fee. Call (208) 366-2394 for center, camping, and park information.

Directions: Approaching Glenns Ferry on I-84 westbound, take Exit 121 and turn left on 1st Avenue. Turn south (left) on Commercial Avenue, then turn right on Madison Avenue. Drive approximately 1 mile on Madison to the park entrance.

A-29. Three Island Crossing Overlook and Trail Ruts (Glenns Ferry). The wagon ruts that descend the bluff on the south side of the river are managed by the State of Idaho and are open to the public. Directions and a map are available at the park's history and education center. Parts of the route over to the ruts are unpaved but suitable for most vehicles in dry weather.

Directions: Return to 1st Avenue and turn west (left). At the end of the road, set your trip odometer and turn left onto Old Highway 30. Drive 1.5 miles and make a left U-turn onto Sailor Creek Road, which curves to the right immediately after crossing the railroad tracks. After crossing the Snake River, the road splits: bear left onto Slick Ranch Road, which is paved. The road makes several turns as it works its way up the bluff. At 5.6 miles the road surface becomes gravel. At 5.7 miles, turn left across a green cattle guard and drive toward the river, watching for wagon swales on both sides of the road. Park at the designated area and walk the gravel path to the overlook and interpretive wayside exhibits. From the rim, look for wagon ruts descending the terrace, faint swales in the farm fields below, and trail crossing the island.

Emigrants who did not wish to chance the crossing below the overlook could continue west along the south side of the Snake River.

Today's traveler faces a decision at Three Island Crossing, too:

To follow the main route of the Oregon Trail via I-84, return to 1st Avenue at Glenns Ferry, follow the business loop to I-84, and go west toward Boise. Look for the ruts of the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail along the south side of the Snake River a few miles west of Glenns Ferry as I-84 comes near the Snake River. Continue with entry A-30 below.

OR,

To follow the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail via state and local roads, *skip to Auto Tour Segment B on page 78. Auto Tour Segment B route rejoins the main Oregon Trail tour route at Parma, Idaho.*

A-30. Bonneville Point (east of Boise, ID) is a Bureau of Land Management trail site with an interpretive pavilion and multiple trail ruts descending from the bluff to the Boise River. Information on the history of the Boise area and the Oregon Trail is provided by several interpretive signs at the pavilion. Part of the access road is unpaved, but it is usually suitable for passenger sedans when dry. Free.

Directions: Signs to the "Bonneville Interpretive Site" help guide the way. From I-84, take Exit 64 to Black's Creek Road. Set your trip odometer and turn left onto Black's Creek Road. At 2.6 miles from the initial turn there is a BLM sign marking the road to the interpretive site at Bonneville Point. The Oregon Trail crosses Black's Creek Road a short distance farther east, with ruts and markers visible on both sides of the road. Where the road splits, bear left onto Upper Black's Creek Road and follow it up the hill. Watch for more trail markers and wagon swales on the right as you reach the ridge top. Park at the interpretive pavilion about 4 miles from the interstate and explore the trail.

A-31. Oregon Trail Historic Reserve (Boise) includes a pedestrian trail that follows original trail ruts along the rim of scenic Boise Valley. Interpretive signs tell the trail story. Down the trail to the right of the parking area is a road cut in the 1860s through the basalt

rim to allow eastbound traffic to ascend the bluff from the Boise River. This cut, known as the "Kelton Ramp," was considered an engineering marvel in its day. Emigrant inscriptions are visible on the basalt rimrock face about halfway down the ramp. The Oregon Trail, however, descended to the river about a half-mile to the east at a very steep, rocky location. Follow the pedestrian trail to the left to see additional exhibits and a monument with an Old Oregon Trail medallion designed by artist Avard Fairbanks, who created many of the sculptures exhibited along the Oregon, Pony Express, and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails. This historic reserve is a particularly good place for children to run and explore the trail, and the view is impressive. This site also has a public restroom.

Directions: From Bonneville Point, return to westbound I-84. Take Exit 57 southeast of Boise and turn east (right) onto Gowen Road/ID-21. Drive 2.3 miles and turn left onto East Lake Forest Drive. Continue around the curve for 0.2 mile to the park entrance and park where permitted. Follow the gravel path along the greenway and look for wagon ruts. A short distance down the trail to the right is the remnant of the old Kelton Stage Road. Return to I-84 westbound and continue into Boise.

A-32. Idaho State Historical Museum (610 N. Julia Davis Drive, Boise) offers exhibits on trail and fur trade history, including the artifacts recovered from the Astorian accident at Caldron Linn. Lots to see here. Open May–Sep, Tues.–Sat. 9 a.m.–5 p.m., and Sun. 1–5 p.m.; and Oct.–April, Tues.–Fri. 9 a.m.–5 p.m., and Sat. 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays. Modest admission charged.

Directions: Take Exit 53 at Boise and turn north (right) onto Vista Avenue. Continue into the city. Cross Overland Road and

Kootenai Street. Ahead, Vista makes an S curve and becomes Capitol Boulevard. Cross the Boise River and take the first right into Julia Davis Park. The museum is ahead on the left.

To continue following the trail to Oregon, turn right out of Julia Davis Park onto Capitol Boulevard. Drive 4 blocks to Front Street and turn left. Go 6 blocks and continue on Front Street as it jogs slightly to the right across 13th Street. Drive 2 more blocks to 15th Street. Turn right, drive 1 block to Grove Street, and turn left. Follow Grove as it swings north and crosses Fairview Avenue. Merge left onto Main Street. Follow Main for about 0 .9 mile and, shortly after crossing to the south side of the Boise River, bear right onto Chinden Boulevard/U.S.-20/26. Continue west toward Caldwell; see entry A-33 for further directions.

A-33. Ward Massacre Site (near Caldwell, ID). Indians attacked the 20-member Ward Party, which was bound for Oregon, in August 1854. Only two boys survived the ordeal. This site today consists of a small, grassy park with a monument over the victims' grave, a state historical sign, and a concrete Oregon Trail marker. The park is managed by the Canyon County Parks and Recreation.

Directions: About 19 miles after entering Chinden Boulevard, turn north (right) on Middleton Road, then east (right) on Lincoln Road, the next road to the right. The county park is on the north side of the road.

A-34. Fort Boise Replica Site (Old Fort Boise Park, Parma, ID) is a reproduction of the original 1834 Hudson's Bay Company trading post. The volunteer-operated replica/museum is open to the public but has limited hours.

Open June–Aug., Fri.–Sun. 1 p.m.–3 p.m. Donations accepted.

Directions: From the Ward Massacre Site, turn north (right) on Middleton Road and drive to Middleton. Turn west (left)) on ID-44/ Star Boulevard. Cross the freeway and at the end of the highway turn south (left) onto Farmway Road (about 7 miles from the Ward site). Turn right onto U.S.-20/26/95 and continue to Parma. The Fort Boise replica is on the right as you enter town.

A-35. The Old Fort Boise Trading Post (Parma) stood somewhere on this stretch of the Snake River, about 5 miles from its replica in Parma. Flooding has washed away any traces of the fort, which is commemorated by a rustic concrete monument in the Fort Boise Wildlife Management Area. The state wildlife area is open April1–Sept. 30, 5 a.m.–10 p.m., and Oct. 1–March 31, 6 a.m.–8 p.m.

Directions: Go north through Parma on U.S.-95. Cross Klahr Road and continue to Old Fort Boise Road. Turn west (left) on Old Fort Boise and drive west to the Fort Boise Wildlife Management Area. Bear right at the river onto a gravel road and continue past two parking areas. Look for the monument on the left, in thick vegetation near the Snake River.

To continue into Oregon along the Auto Tour Route, take Old Fort Boise Road back to U.S.-95. Turn south (right) on U.S. 95 and return to Parma. In Parma, turn right on Roswell Boulevard and follow it south. The road becomes Wamstad Road. Turn west (right) on ID-18 and go through Roswell. Follow ID-18/Roswell Road along a series of jogs and into Oregon, where the road makes a sharp turn south at the river. Stay on Roswell Road as it turns west and crosses the Snake River. Turn right on OR-201 and continue to Adrian, Oregon. The Auto Tour Route for the Oregon Trail through Oregon and Washington begins here.

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT B: THE SOUTH ALTERNATE OREGON TRAIL ROUTE, GLENNS FERRY TO OREGON STATE LINE

Emigrants who were unable to cross at Three Island Crossing continued down the south side of the Snake River on the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail. The South Alternate begins at Glenns Ferry, follows the river northwestward, and enters present-day Oregon about three miles beyond Homedale, Idaho.

B-1. Bruneau Sand Dune (27609 Sand Dunes Road, northeast of Bruneau, ID), about 2 miles north of the trail, was a landmark along the South Alternate route. It is an interesting natural feature—the tallest free-standing sand dune in the United States. View the dune from the road or visit Bruneau Dunes State Park for a closer look. Open year-round, daily, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Entrance $4/vehicle.

Directions: At Glenns Ferry, go west on First Avenue/Business Loop 84 and continue out of town. The road merges onto Frontage Road/Old Highway 30, which closely parallels I-84. *Look for white posts marking the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail on the south side of the Snake River a few miles west of Glenns Ferry.* In about 4.5 miles, the road ends at an intersection. Turn left onto the I-84 business loop and enter the town of Hammett. Turn east (left) onto ID-78, then take the next right where the highway jogs south. At the edge of town, ID-78 turns west. Continue about 14 miles, following signs to the dunes. The park is on the south side of the road.

B-2. The Utter Disaster Site (near Castle Butte, southeast of Murphy, ID) is where Indians attacked a wagon train of 44 people led by Elijah Utter in September 1860. Indian fighters encircled the train and struck

repeatedly over nearly two days, killing 11 emigrants. The sufferings of the survivors as they struggled west along the Snake River rivaled those of the better-known Donner Party. This site must be viewed from the road, as land here is privately owned. For additional sites related to the Utter Disaster, see the Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide Across Oregon and Washington.

Directions: Continue west on ID-78. At the junction just west of Bruneau Dunes State Park, turn left onto ID-51/78. West of Bruneau the road splits. Stay right on ID-78 as it turns northwest; watch for white trail markers beginning around milepost 70. Continue through Grand View on ID-78/Mud Flat Road for about 10 miles. Over this distance, the road curves west, then northwest, and west again. Cross Castle Creek and slow to watch for Wees Road just ahead and on the north (right) side of the road. A state historical sign about the Utter Disaster is located near this intersection. Set your vehicle's trip odometer and continue north up Wees Road, a maintained gravel road. In about 2.5 miles, look for the trail landmark of Castle Butte off to the west. Pass Nettleton Road and continue north. At about 3.7 miles, look for a fenced pullout (sometimes partly hidden by vegetation) on the left, where a historical sign provides more information about the attack. The emigrants first were attacked at Henderson Flat, a short distance east of the pullout, and then were struck again just west of the pullout.

A rest stop with toilets is located along ID-78 at the Bureau of Land Management's Fossil Creek Trailhead, about 8 miles west of the Wees Road turnoff.

B-3. **Owyhee County Historical Museum (17085 Basey Street, Murphy, ID)** offers some pioneer exhibits and a good selection of books and trail guides. Ask for the Idaho Oregon-California Trails Association brochure on the Utter Disaster and a related attack that occurred near Huntington, Oregon. Open Tues.–Sat. 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Closed between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Directions: From the Utter site, return to ID-78 and continue west to Murphy. On entering town, watch for the Utter monument located in front of the Owyhee County Courthouse. Turn southwest (left) on Hailey Street, then southeast (left) at the next intersection, onto Basey Street. The museum is on the right.

B-4. Givens Hot Springs (Givens Hot Springs, ID) were a minor landmark along the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail. Some emigrants reported that the water was hot enough to cook eggs. Today it is part of a commercially operated hot-spring pool, campground, and park complex. A state historical sign about the springs is located along the highway.

Directions: From Murphy, continue west on ID-78 for 18 miles. The historical marker is on the left.

Continue west on ID-78 and watch for white trail markers on the right about 5.5 miles from Givens Hot Springs. Where ID-78 ends at Marsing, you have two choices:

To return to the main route of the Oregon trail and conclude your tour at Fort Boise, turn west (left) on ID-55 and continue about a mile to the intersection of ID-55 with U.S.-95. Go straight (west) on U.S. 95 and drive to Parma. Turn southwest (right) on U.S.-20/26 to the Fort Boise Replica site. Continue with entry A-34 above and conclude your tour at the site of Old Fort Boise Trading Post.

OR,

To stay on the route of the South Alternate, turn west (left) on Main Street/ID-55 and continue about 9 miles to Homedale. Turn left onto Main Street, at the south edge of town. Drive 0.7 mile and turn west (left) on Idaho Avenue/ID-19. Continue to the Oregon state line, where ID-19 becomes OR-201.

The auto tour of the South Alternate route to its junction with the main Oregon Trail at Nyssa, Oregon, continues in the Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide Across Oregon and Washington.

This ends the Auto Tour Route of the Oregon and California National Historic Trails across Idaho.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Email: ntsl_interpretation@nps.gov

Oregon NHT
www.nps.gov/oreg
California NHT
www.nps.gov/cali

Idaho Tourism
http://accessidaho.org/tourism_transport/visit_idaho.html

Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA)
www.octa-trails.org

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National Historic Trails
Idaho
Auto Tour Route Map

MONTANA

IDAHO

NEVADA

UTAH

WYOMING

Boise
Mountain Home
Glenns Ferry
Twin Falls
Burley
Pocatello
Idaho Falls
Soda Springs
Montpelier
Elmore
Ada
Canyon
Owyhee
Camas
Blaine
Lincoln
Jerome
Gooding
Minnikoda
Butte
Bingham
Caribou
Power
Cassia
Oneida
Franklin
Bear Lake
Snake River

- Auto Tour Route Interpretive Feature - segment A
- Auto Tour Route Interpretive Feature - segment B
- Oregon Trail - Main Route
- Oregon Trail - North Alt.
- Oregon Trail - South Alt.
- Goodale Cutoff Trail
- Bidwell-Bartleson Trail
- California Trail - Primary Route
- Hudspeth Cutoff Trail
- Salt Lake Cutoff Trail
- 15 Interstate Highway
- 30 U.S. Highway
- 34 Idaho State Road

OREGON TRAIL NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

CALIFORNIA TRAIL NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

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